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Editorial

However the coming generations may judge Karl Barth, it is unquestionable that one of his greatest contributions to Christian theology was his rediscovery of a basic, biblical concept of God—that he is ‘wholly other’. But an over-emphasis on God’s holiness led to a preoccupation with human sinfulness which in turn led to the abandonment of the world, as in the Hindu renunciation. Francis Schaeffer biting remarks that in our enthusiasm to maintain God’s holiness and human depravity, some evangelical theologies have reduced man to zero. On the other hand, an overemphasis on man as the image of God leads either to *vedantic ahambrahmasmi*, ‘I am God’, or to secular utopias. Those Christians who sympathize with the former approach understand church as being ‘*out of*’ this world, while those who emphasize the latter understand it as ‘*belonging*’ to the world. One great weakness of both the positions is that evil and its growth, such as in violence and wars, cannot be adequately explained.

The cross of Jesus Christ is the connecting link between God’s holiness and his love. In the Bible, God is holy love. The cross is where justice and mercy meet. Incarnation essentially involves suffering. Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s insight that only participants can be prophets is fully biblical.

Liberation theology is a challenge not only to our generation but to all generations, for it raises the question not of right or wrong theology, but the very basic question of what theology is. As our generation attempts to respond to the whole challenge of liberation theology, I am convinced that the above three basics must always be kept intact: the holiness of God, God’s image in man and incarnation as suffering. In several ways these elements come through in the articles in this issue. We invite you to respond. Your responses will be published.

In this issue a variety of forms are used—articles, sermon, Bible study, interview, lecture, multilogue, but there is a unifying theme of liberation theology. The coming annual meeting of the Theological Commission in Singapore in June–July 1986 can be, if discerning and obedient to the Spirit of God, a breakthrough in evangelical thinking and action. May God help us all in both.

Sunand Sumithra [p. 104](#)

Bible Study (for small groups) Christ Has Made Us Free: Characteristics and Limitations of Christian Freedom

Michael Green

*Reprinted from Freedom Tear Fund Bible Study Booklet No. 4 with
permission*

Jesus came to 'set the captives free' ([Luke 4:18](#)). What is this going to mean in practice? What difference is your response to Jesus going to make to the way in which you exercise responsible choices?

I can't tell you. You see, you are committed to a person, not to a set of rules. The world is full of systems which insistently call for your obedience. But for you there is one Master only, Jesus Christ. And his way was often unusual, uncomfortable, and at variance with the accepted norms of the pious. When he was confronted by a woman caught in the act of adultery, he did not say, 'The rule book says she should be stoned. Let's get on with it'. He looked at her accusers, so smug in their self-satisfaction, and said, '*Let the man who never sinned among you be the first to throw a stone.*' He began with the woman, not the hard-and-fast rule. He wanted to help her, reclaim her. Notice, he wasn't being permissive about what she had done. What was the object of the old law? Why, to stop adultery. What was the object of Jesus's approach? It was identical. But he achieved it, not by slating her, but by accepting her just as she was, and then giving her a clean start, '*Neither do I condemn you*' and a new direction, '*Go and sin no more*' ([John 8:7, 11](#)). I'll bet she didn't. In-so-far as I follow Jesus, then, I shall not automatically be a hanger, a flogger, an anti-divorce, anti-abortion man without further reflection. No, I shall try to act with Christ's freedom in the different choices that beset me, asking him to use me as his agent in bringing sacrificial love into each situation.

Can we find any guide-lines in the New Testament for our use of freedom, even if there is a shortage of narrow rules? Yes, indeed. Here are a few questions we could usefully check ourselves by, to make sure our Christian freedom does not turn into licence.

PERSONAL

On the personal level to start with, *will it make for growth?* God's plan **P. 105** for me is to be so freed from self-centredness that I grow up into the fullness of humanity as Christ knew it ([Ephesians 4:13](#)). That and nothing less is the purpose of God's rescue operation. As a responsible Christian I am not going to allow my freedom to imperil my development as a friend and servant of my Lord. It will not do for those who were 'fornicators, idolaters, homosexuals, thieves, swindlers and slanderers' simply to cry, 'I am free to do anything.' That invites Paul's response, '*Yes, but not everything is for my good. No doubt I am free to do anything, but I for one will not let anything make free with me*' ([1 Corinthians 6:12](#)). He proceeded to apply that, by way of example, to food, drink and sex. Notice that there was no 'Index of Prohibited Things'. Just the invitation, as Christ's free man, to see where the cap fits and put it on. '*Am I not a free man?*' asks Paul at the outset of one chapter. By the end of it, however, he is saying, '*I am like a boxer who does not beat the air; I bruise my own body and make it know its master*' ([1 Corinthians 9:1, 26f.](#)).

There has been a tendency among Christians with a strong sense of the world, the flesh and the devil, to restrict 'worldliness' to a very narrow area of life—smoking, drinking, reading-matter, films and so on. Far more serious, I suggest, is the danger to our growth as persons which comes from assuming it is *our right* to get married, have a car, a washing machine, good holidays, pleasant working conditions and an ever-increasing salary, without the least pang of conscience about the Third World. This sort of selfishness is more corroding than 'X' Certificate films. '*You, my friends, have been called to freedom. But do not allow your freedom to be an occasion for the self to have its way. Rather, be servants to one another in love*' ([Galatians 5:13](#)).

SOCIAL

On the social level, we might well ask, will it show love? There is a discussion in the Epistle to the Romans which we could easily dismiss as irrelevant. It is all about whether you should be a vegetarian or not if you are a Christian, in view of the fact that most of the meat in the ancient world had been offered to some idol or other. The note of freedom is clearly sounded by Paul. *'I am perfectly sure, on the authority of the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing really wrong with eating meat which has been offered to idols.'* But at once comes the note of loving responsibility to others: *'But if your brother is bothered by what you eat, you are not acting in love if you go ahead and eat it. Don't let your eating ruin someone for whom Christ died.... After all, the important thing for us as Christians is not what we eat or drink, P. 106 but stirring up goodness and peace and joy from the Holy Spirit. If you let Christ be Lord in these affairs, God will be glad: and so will others, In this way aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up....'* He concludes the discussion thus: *'Let's please the other fellow, not ourselves, and do what is for his good and thus build him up in the Lord. Christ did not please himself'* ([Romans 14:14-15:3](#)). If we applied that attitude to our relationships with others, the church would be a lot freer, a lot less criticizing, and a great deal more effective in creating unity and harmony in society. Why not ask the Lord to show you how you can be a channel for his love and integration among the people with whom you live and work?

This love will lead you to want to share with others the good news you rejoice in. Here again, there is no compulsion about it, no set way of doing it, but, as Paul put it, *'I am a free man and own no master; but I have made myself every man's servant' in order to win them. 'To the Jews I behaved as a Jew in order to win the Jews. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I was not outside the law in God's sight, being under law to Christ) in order to win those outside the law.... I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some'* ([1 Corinthians 9:12-22](#)). No doubt there were plenty of people who said "Tut-tut, when they saw Paul behaving as a Pharisee one day in a crowd of Jews he was trying to evangelize, and associating with Gentile street people the next day as he put the good news in terms that would make sense to them. But that is how he used his Christian freedom in loving service to the community in which he worked. In all this flexibility, 'I am not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ' ([1 Corinthians 10:33](#); [11:1](#)).

POLITICAL

On the political level, the question is, perhaps, how can I use my freedom to promote order and justice? And that is a question it is very hard to answer. The Bible makes it plain that in general Christians should *'obey the government, for God is the one who has put it there. There is no government anywhere that God has not placed in power. So those who refuse to obey the laws of the land are refusing to obey God'* ([Romans 13:1ff.](#)). That was not written under a just democracy, but under Nero's Rome! Even a bad government is better than anarchy. God wants his creatures to live in harmony with the order (*cosmos* in Greek) which he brought into the cosmos.

But God is the author of justice, as well as of order. So what should p. 107 Christians do when the existing régime is utterly corrupt? Well, that situation had actually arisen in the times when the New Testament was written. The book of Revelation is addressed to just such a situation. It advocates passive resistance, not violent revolution ([Revelation 13](#)), for, as Jesus had said, 'the man who takes the sword will perish by the sword' ([Matthew 25:52](#))—and that leads not to greater freedom but to less! Jesus, ironically

crucified as a Zealot revolutionary, disappointed many of his followers because he refused to allow the nationalist cause against Rome or the ideological cause for the kingdom of God to tempt him to take up arms. Force is not exorcized by force. Those who follow Jesus know that violence has its teeth drawn not by retaliation but by patient, innocent suffering. That is the conviction that stimulates a man like Bishop Helder Camara in Brazil. Dedicated to the cause of non-violence, he is none the less a passionate advocate of the underprivileged and poverty-stricken in Brazil, that land of shattering inequalities. But nevertheless he does say, 'I respect and shall always respect those who, after thinking about it, have chosen or will choose violence.'

That is what Camilo Torres did, the revolutionary priest in Colombia. There the conditions of the poor were so oppressive that he saw no alternative to engaging in active and violent attempts to overthrow the régime. He believed that in this way he was in fact fulfilling the Christian law of love to one's neighbour. His aim was peaceful revolution; 'Revolution *can* be peaceful if the minority does not resist it with violence.' But if armed force proves the only way to get revolution, it must, he felt, be accepted, for 'the Revolution is the way to get a government which will feed the hungry, clothe the naked, teach the ignorant, and make possible a true love for our neighbours. This is why the Revolution is not only permitted but is obligatory for all Christians who see in it the most effective way of making possible a greater love for all men.'

Such was Camilo Torres' considered use of his Christian freedom. We may feel that he was wrong to countenance violence even as a last resort. And in his case violence showed its self-destructive nature, for he was shot in action by government forces on 15 February 1966. But at all events he represents a Christian revolutionary who certainly did not use his freedom as a cloak either for aimless anarchy or for pietistic acceptance of the *status quo*, but sought conscientiously to promote both order and justice in his country.

We too may make mistakes. There is no one blueprint for political action in a world as complex as ours. But we too are called to seek both order and justice without subordinating one to the other. p. 108

SPIRITUAL

On the spiritual level, we shall ask ourselves, how can I please Christ? What would he want me to do? How would he act in such circumstances? '*Whatever you do or say, do everything as the representative of the Lord Jesus*' ([Colossians 3:17](#)) is Paul's crowning advice to the Christians at Colossae.

It is interesting to see how Paul handled the enthusiasts for freedom at Corinth. They had a wonderful vitality and joyful sense of liberation which is sadly lacking these days in many church circles. They believed they had already entered on their reign with Christ. They had already tasted the powers of the age to come. They were free men and could do what they liked. 'All things are lawful for me,' was their cry. 'All things are ours.'

'Yes, indeed,' is the substance of Paul's reply. '*All things are indeed yours. But you are Christ's*' ([1 Corinthians 3:21-23](#); cf. [6:12](#)). You are called to exercise your Christian freedom under his control. All truly Christian freedom is marked with the cross of Jesus, the one who showed himself most free as he went to the cross for others. That is why Paul determined to know no other message among these enthusiastic Corinthians, except Christ crucified. He and he alone was the model for Christian freedom. Free as he was, Paul knew he was under the law of personal accountability to Christ.

So, then, we should value these guide-lines which the New Testament gives us to our use of freedom. Jesus spells freedom. '*For freedom Christ has set us free. Let us therefore refuse to be tied up in the chains of slavery again*' ([Galatians 5:1](#)).

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Galatians 4:1-10

One: Christ has set us free from immaturity and slavery and given us 'rights'—what are those rights? vs. [5-7](#). cf. [John 8:31-32](#) and [34-46](#).

Two: In what ways can we deliberately place ourselves back in 'slavery'? vs. [8-10](#).

Galatians 5:1 and 13-16

Three: Once again the world's view of freedom is turned upside down—we are freed from sins that enslave us in order to create a positive life in a self-disciplined way.

What has Christ set us free to do? vs. [16](#), [22-23](#). cf. [1 Cor. 10:24](#) and [Romans 6:22](#). p. 109

Four: The way of the cross leads to freedom (v.[24](#))—the crucifixion of sinful nature leads to new life.

Look individually at the fruit of the spirit and consider v.[26](#)—which illustrates attitudes that are a hindrance to a free life—compare the two (the fruit and the attitudes that hinder its development).

1 Corinthians 10:23-33 and 1 Corinthians 8:9-13

Five: Look at the above verses and discuss where to draw the line in relation to freedom. Think of situations where you might deliberately limit your freedom for the sake of others.

Six: Truth is an important ingredient in the battle for freedom. The devil is portrayed in the Bible as the 'deceiver' or 'liar', Jesus in [John 8](#) says, 'If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed' and in the same conversation says of those who hold to his teaching that 'the truth will set you free'.

(a) In the struggle for freedom the Christian role is to combat lies and dishonesty—false ideas and fantasy. Discuss this and think of examples of where the 'world' is selling a lie that we must combat, i.e. over the value of an individual—where his work—or lack of it—may make him appear worthless. Or, where contemporary views of mankind see him as simply another species of animal. A discussion of racism and sexism could be relevant in this context.

(b) Consider the 'fantasy' worlds that are encouraged by media and advertising such as the unreality of sexual dreams—and discuss how truth can set people free from these fantasies.

Seven: (a) Look again at Michael Green's comments in Section 3 on non-violence and justice. Can the example of Camilo Torres square with the way of the servant? Had he overstepped the limit of Christian freedom when he took the path of violence?

(b) Are there ways in which our own society is being unjust either here or in its attitude to those in the third world? If, so how should we deal with it? Exercising our freedom and showing a concern for order and justice?

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Liberation Theologies: Looking at Poverty from the Underside

W. Dayton Roberts

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The world map on my wall was prepared by an 'Aussie'. It looks upside-down. The Australian continent is top centre. To its left is, South America, dropping like an hourglass into Central America and the United States. Below and slightly to the right are the vast masses of Asia and Europe, and at the far right, Africa.

This is how the world is viewed—from down under.

A comparable approach to social theology has emerged south of the border. It comes from the attempt by Latin American Christians to understand their history and experience in light of a rediscovered Bible.

More than 20 nations in Middle and South America have shared a common situation for four centuries. It includes the confusion of cross and sword, the political and cultural suppression of huge ethnic nations such as the Quechuas and Aztecs, economic exploitation of the masses by powerful oligarchies, and a blind, heartless official religion that has affirmed the rich but abandoned the poor.

The emerging 'view from below' is frequently called the 'Theology of Liberation'. It is really a family of theologies, ranging from conservative to heterodox.

CHARACTERISTICS

The liberation theologies display at least three identifiable characteristics:

They share a prior commitment to the poor. Prior to what? To everything else. In liberation theologies, this priority means more than simply recognizing our 'preferential option' to defend the poor and minister to them. It also acknowledges that in a particular way, God speaks through the poor. The gospel cannot be understood until it is seen from their perspective. 'Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'.

Justo and Catherine Gonzalez have underlined this truth in *Liberation Preaching* (Abingdon, 1980). Using the illustration of the North American folk hero, the Lone Ranger, and his mute Indian helper, Tonto (in Spanish, 'stupid'), they say, in effect, 'What is currently happening is that Tonto has finally decided to speak up, and is making much more sense than the Lone Ranger ever did....' p. 111

Their whimsical analogy continues, 'The Lone Ranger, with his mask, his white horse, and his flashy gear, thought he knew all about doing justice. But Tonto is telling him that one can only know injustice when one suffers it.... The word of the gospel today, as in the times of Jesus—as ever—comes to us most clearly in the painful groans of the oppressed. We must listen to those groans. We must join the struggle to the point where we, too, must groan. Or we may choose the other alternative, which is not to hear the gospel at all.'

This position makes the almost 'evangelical' assumption that 'the powerless have readier access to an authentic understanding of the gospel than do the powerful'. This sounds very much like something Saint Paul might have written to the Corinthians ([1 Cor. 1](#)). It seems to ring true.

We must issue a warning, however. A new understanding of the importance of the poor in the plan of God should not be allowed to swing the pendulum too far the other

way. It is not necessarily true that what is 'good news' for the poor is consequently 'bad news' for the rich. When we take into account the entire biblical context we shall see that we all stand equally naked before the holy God.

In the Bible, not only the poor deserve a preferential option. So do the children, and perhaps the 'stranger that is within your gates', and the widows. God's concern must be understood to be universal and all-embracing.

Liberation theologies espouse a new exegesis or even a new hermeneutic. Bible scholars, such as José Míguez Bonino, have been trying to see the Bible anew from the 'down-under' perspective of the poor and oppressed. This effort has opened up a vast and fruitful understanding of Hebrew roots and scriptural expressions that had perhaps been lost to many of us through inadequate translations or because of traditional misinterpretations.

Until recently, little exegetical analysis had been done of words relating to oppression, poverty, injustice. Yet at least 14 different Hebrew roots, I am told, signify some aspect of 'oppression', regardless of how those words may be translated in existing versions. Exploring these rich veins of meaning throws tremendous light on the nature of God's concerns today.

Likewise, much of the significance of many Old Testament passages is lost to us by the careless rendition into English of certain Hebrew words. For example, the word 'righteousness' is often used rather than 'justice'. Many other such instances could be cited.

Some exponents of a liberation hermeneutic—most of them, as a matter of fact—go so far as to maintain that the reader of the Bible must [p. 112](#) deliberately choose his eyeglasses *before* he begins reading, and that the 'preferential option for the poor' means just that—a deliberate bias or perspective. Without this, the true meaning cannot be known. We must discard our North Atlantic lenses, we are told, and put on Third World ones—we must lay aside the eyeglasses of the rich to use those of the poor. Some even say we must abandon our capitalistic spectacles in favour of Marxist ones. Otherwise, they affirm, we cannot truly discern what God is trying to say.

Yet how correct is this? Certainly it may have some positive value as an exegetical or devotional exercise, but its affirmation as a theological principle seems simply to reject one set of *a priori* factors for another, and it deprives God's revelation of objective authority. Likewise, it appears to deny that the Holy Spirit can bring fresh conviction or understanding to the reader who has failed to put on his *a priori* spectacles.

Liberation theologians are 'doing theology' in a sociological context. Fifty years ago, when I was in college, theology was thought of as a Christian philosophy. Consequently, to prepare for the ministry one studied philosophy, apologetics, logic—and perhaps some psychology (to understand the conversion experience and to apply Christian truth to personal needs). At that time the social sciences were in their infancy as academic disciplines.

Today, the situation has changed. The social sciences are demanding much more attention. And the theologians must be versed not only in anthropology, but also in sociology, political science, and economics as well. On balance, philosophy and apologetics receive less attention. Theology is to be *done*, not just *learned*.

The problem is that most university graduates in Latin America assume that the Marxist theory of social dynamics is the valid one. The struggle between the classes is said to be the motor of social progress. And, superficially, the social experience of the continent *seems* to support Marx's theory. Many Latins see this in the history of Spanish colonization, the traditional conflict of liberals versus conservatives, the exploitation of indigenous tribes and imported slaves, the '*patron-peon*' dichotomy, the current economic oppression of the urban masses, and numerous other factors.

Thus, if they begin by analyzing the problem in Marxist terms, it is easy for Latin Americans to see the Christian solution in the same categories. Need caused by sin is equated with economic oppression, and salvation becomes social liberation. If the world view is one of social conflict, then liberation will be seen in the same terms.

However, the biblical world view is not one of dialectical [p. 113](#) materialism. The Bible sees humanity as existing in a crucible of cosmic conflict—caught in a struggle between the divine and the demonic. The war is not between capital and labour, or the bourgeois and the oppressed (although these conflicts may also exist), but it is between God and Satan, good and evil. If this is the case, we cannot be satisfied with Marxist analyses, despite any superficial light that they may shed.

Liberation theologies are almost irresistibly attractive to Latin Americans. They jibe with Latin social theory and promise immediate and political solutions to the excruciating problems presently endured. But they offer an ephemeral promise—one not rooted in basic, cosmic reality. Unless sin and salvation are understood in terms of deliverance from Satan's power, they are not understood at all. Human solutions that are developed within the superficial parameters of dialectic materialism will never get to the root of the problem.

CONCERNS OVER LIBERATION THEOLOGIES

We are left with a number of profound concerns as we work to understand the view from down under. The critical generalizations that follow may not be entirely accurate in all cases, but they show which way the wind is blowing.

1. *Politicization.* Liberation theologies affirm the social responsibility of Christians, but invariably they stumble over the rock of politicization. It is impossible to stay out of politics; it is the very nature of liberation theology to get involved in politics. Political solutions are, however, always human, always finite, always error-prone.

To think that the Exodus of God's chosen people should be the paradigm for revolution in the Sierra Maestra or the Peruvian Andes is somehow to overlook some basic principles of Bible interpretation. Were Fidel Castro's revolutionaries God's chosen people? The Exodus should be seen as a paradigm not of a secular revolution but of the Christian church.

Eventually, political interests always succeed in snuffing out spiritual intentions, as a study of the Cuban, Chilean, Guatemalan, and other revolutionary situations will reveal. The Basic Church Communities movement in Brazil, for example, has demonstrated it. A politicized church is a church on the skids because it is a here-and-now church, without 'eternity in its heart'.

2. *Pelagianism.* It is impossible to keep universalism and Pelagianism (earning salvation partly by acquired merit) out of liberation theologies. Salvation by works may not be openly espoused, but it is [p. 114](#) certainly implied in the concept of socio-political-economic liberation from oppression. This is a part of the liberation theologies' Roman Catholic baggage. And it is not easy for a liberation theologian to avoid the trap of universalism.

3. *Atonement: moral influence only.* Liberation theologies unconsciously revert to pre-Anselmic theories of the atonement of Jesus Christ. Anselm's 'satisfaction' theory, whereby the Mediator satisfies the demands of God's righteousness while vicariously dying on cross for sinful human beings, was the foundation on which the Reformation was built. But liberation theologies rest on an theory of 'moral influence'. Here again, the Catholic impact is evident.

4. *Substitutes for spirituality.* The liberation theology movement has spawned a multitude of substitutes for the real thing in the Christian life and experience. For example, evangelization frequently has become nothing more than an effort to create an awareness that will prepare people for political action.

5. *Confused values.* Even worse, the movement has often exhibited non-Christian values. An effort to raise a people's political awareness, for example, can easily result in bitter hatred of landlords. Any modelling of class conflict itself becomes conflictive. And when working in horizontal, social contexts, it is easy for Christians to be trapped by materialism, humanism, and other such concepts.

6. *Loss of the Holy Spirit in method.* There seems to be a certain incongruity between the exercise of the gifts of the sovereign Holy Spirit and the almost exclusively man-centred methodology of much liberation thinking. Leaders of the movement have yet to define convincingly the Holy Spirit's role in social revolution. Many observers would say it cannot be done. Pneumatology is conspicuously absent from liberation theologies.

7. *Misunderstanding of Scripture.* Instead of enhancing the work of Christ and understanding its spiritual power, liberation theologies reread the Scripture to depict Jesus as a messiah of political involvement. This rereading often distorts the truth. It misses the paradoxes of faith, the spiritual measurements of personal commitment, the quality of love, the mystery of holiness, and the sinfulness of sin. In short, it diminishes the supernatural dimensions of a personal relationship with God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit our Advocate.

In our search for a social theology to clarify the mission of the church, it is appropriate, as Samuel Escobar has pointed out, that we find in the theologies of liberation an important challenge and stimulus to our evangelical faith, but never a viable alternative to it.

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Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation

Vatican, Rome

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This Instruction was adopted at an Ordinary meeting of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and was approved at an audience granted to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect, by His Holiness Pope John Paul II on 6th August 1984, who ordered its publication.

Evangelicals will want to identify with many of the positions outlined in this important document. The remainder of the Instruction will be published in the next issue of Evangelical Review of Theology.

(Editors)

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of freedom and a force for liberation. In recent years, this essential truth has become the object of reflection for theologians, with a new kind of attention which is itself full of promise.

Liberation is first and foremost liberation from the radical slavery of sin. Its end and its goal is the freedom of the children of God, which is the gift of grace. As a logical consequence, it calls for freedom from many different kinds of slavery in the cultural, economic, social and political spheres, all of which derive ultimately from sin, and so often prevent people from living in a manner befitting their dignity. To discern clearly what is fundamental to this issue and what is a by-product of it, is an indispensable condition for any theological reflection on liberation.

Faced with the urgency of certain problems, some are tempted to emphasize, unilaterally, the liberation from servitude of an earthly and temporal kind. They do so in such a way that they seem to put liberation from sin in second place, and so fail to give it the primary importance it is due. Thus, their very presentation of the problems is confused and ambiguous. Others, in an effort to learn more precisely what are the causes of the slavery which they want to end, make use of different concepts without sufficient critical caution. It is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to purify these borrowed concepts of an ideological inspiration which is incompatible with Christian faith and the ethical requirements which flow from it.

The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith does not intend to deal here with the vast theme of Christian freedom and liberation in its own right. This it intends to do in a subsequent [p. 116](#) document which will detail in a positive fashion the great richness of this theme for the doctrine and life of the Church.

The present Instruction has a much more limited and precise purpose: to draw the attention of pastors, theologians, and all the faithful to the deviations, and risks of deviation, damaging to the faith and to Christian living, that are brought about by certain forms of liberation theology which use, in an insufficiently critical manner, concepts borrowed from various currents of marxist thought.

This warning should in no way be interpreted as a disavowal of all those who want to respond generously and with an authentic evangelical spirit to the 'preferential option for the poor'. It should not at all serve as an excuse for those who maintain an attitude of neutrality and indifference in the face of the tragic and pressing problems of human misery and injustice. It is, on the contrary, dictated by the certitude that the serious ideological deviations which it points out tends inevitably to betray the cause of the poor. More than ever, it is important that numerous Christians, whose faith is clear and who are committed to live the Christian life in its fullness, become involved in the struggle for justice, freedom and human dignity because of their love for their disinherited, oppressed and persecuted brothers and sisters. More than ever, the Church intends to condemn abuses, injustices and attacks against freedom, wherever they occur and whoever commits them. She intends to struggle, by her own means, for the defence and advancement of the rights of mankind, especially of the poor.

I AN ASPIRATION

1. The powerful and almost irresistible aspiration that people have for *liberation* constitutes one of the principal *signs of the times* which the Church. has to examine and interpret in

the light of the Gospel.¹ This major phenomenon of our time is universally widespread, though it takes on different forms and exists in different degrees according to the particular people involved. It is, above all, among those people who bear the burdens of misery and in the heart of the disinherited classes that this aspiration expresses itself with the greatest force.

2. This yearning shows the authentic, if obscure, perception of the dignity of the human person, created 'in the image and likeness of God' ([Gen. 1:26-27](#)), ridiculed and scorned in the midst of a variety of different oppressions: cultural, political, racial, social and economic, often in conjunction with one another. **p. 117**

3. In revealing to them their vocation as children of God, the Gospel has elicited in the hearts of mankind a demand and a positive will for a peaceful and just fraternal life in which everyone will find respect and the conditions for spiritual as well as material development. This requirement is no doubt at the very basis of the aspiration we are talking about here.

4. Consequently mankind will no longer passively submit to crushing poverty with its effects of death, disease and decline. He resents this misery as an intolerable violation of his native dignity. Many factors, and among them certainly the leaven of the Gospel, have contributed to an awakening of the consciousness of the oppressed.

5. It is widely known, even in still illiterate sections of the world, that, thanks to the amazing advances in science and technology, mankind, still growing in numbers, is capable of assuring each human being the minimum of goods required by his dignity as a person.

6. The scandal of the shocking inequality between the rich and poor—whether between rich and poor countries, or between social classes in a single nation—is no longer tolerated. On one hand, people have attained an unheard of abundance which is given to waste, while on the other hand so many live in such poverty, deprived of the basic necessities, that one is hardly able even to count the victims of malnutrition.

7. The lack of equity and of a sense of solidarity in international transactions works to the advantage of the industrialized nations so that the gulf between the rich and the poor is ever widening. Hence derives the feeling of frustration among third world countries, and the accusations of exploitation and economic colonialism brought against the industrialized nations.

8. The memory of crimes of a certain type of colonialism and of its effects often aggravates these injuries and wounds.

9. The Apostolic See, in accord with the Second Vatican Council, and together with the Episcopal Conferences, has not ceased to denounce the scandal involved in the gigantic arms race which, in addition to the threat which it poses to peace, squanders amounts of money so large that even a fraction of it would be sufficient to respond to the needs of those people who want for the basic essentials of life.

II EXPRESSIONS OF THIS ASPIRATION

1. The yearning for justice and for the effective recognition of the dignity of every human being needs, like every deep aspiration, to be clarified and guided. **P. 118**

2. In effect, a discernment process is necessary which takes into account both the theoretical and the practical *manifestations* of this aspiration. For there are many political and social movements which present themselves as authentic spokesmen for the

¹ Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 4.

aspirations of the poor, and claim to be able, though by recourse to violent means, to bring about the radical changes which will put an end to the oppression and misery of people.

3. So the aspiration for justice often finds itself the captive of ideologies which hide or prevent its meaning, and which propose to people struggling for their liberation goals which are contrary to the true purpose of human life. They propose ways of action which imply the systematic recourse to violence, contrary to any ethic which is respectful of persons.

4. The interpretation of the *signs of the times in the light of the Gospel* requires, then, that we examine the meaning of this deep yearning of people for justice, but also that we study with critical discernment the theoretical and practical expressions which this aspiration has taken on.

III LIBERATION, A CHRISTIAN THEME

1. Taken by itself, the desire for liberation finds a strong and fraternal echo in the heart and spirit of Christians.

2. Thus, in accord with this aspiration, the theological and pastoral movement known as 'Liberation Theology' was born, first in the countries of Latin America which are marked by the religious and cultural heritage of Christianity, and then in other countries of the third world, as well as in certain circles in the industrialized countries.

3. The expression, 'Theology of Liberation', refers first of all to a special concern for the poor and the victims of oppression, which in turn begets a commitment to justice. Starting with this approach, we can distinguish several, often contradictory, ways of understanding the Christian meaning of poverty and the type of commitment to justice which it requires. As with all movements of ideas, the 'theologies of liberation' present diverse theological positions. Their doctrinal frontiers are badly defined.

4. The aspiration for *liberation*, as the term itself suggests, repeats a theme which is fundamental to the Old and New Testaments. In itself, the expression 'theology of liberation' is a thoroughly valid term: it designates a theological reflection centred on the biblical theme of liberation and freedom, and on the urgency of its practical realization.

The meeting, then, of the aspiration for liberation and the theologies p. 119 of liberation is not one of mere chance. The significance of this encounter between the two can be understood only in light of the specific message of Revelation, authentically interpreted by the Magisterium of the Church.²

IV BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

1. Thus a theology of liberation correctly understood constitutes an invitation to theologians to deepen certain essential biblical themes with a concern for the grave and urgent questions which the contemporary yearning for liberation, and those movements which more or less faithfully echo it, pose for the Church. We dare not forget for a single instant the situations of acute distress which issue such a dramatic call to theologians.

2. The radical experience of *Christian liberty*³ is our first point of reference. Christ, our Liberator, has freed us from sin and from slavery to the Law and to the flesh, which is the mark of the condition of sinful mankind. Thus it is the new life of grace, fruit of justification, which makes us free. This means that the most radical form of slavery is

² Cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 10.

³ Cf. [Gal. 5, 1ff.](#)

slavery to sin. Other forms of slavery find their deepest root in slavery to sin. That is why freedom in the full Christian sense, characterized by the life in the Spirit, cannot be confused with a licence to give in to the desires of the flesh. Freedom is a new life in love.

3. The 'theologies of liberation' make wide use of readings from the book of Exodus. The exodus, in fact, is the fundamental event in the formation of the chosen people. It represents freedom from foreign domination and from slavery. One will note that the specific significance of the event comes from its purpose, for this liberation is ordered to the foundation of the people of God and the Covenant cult celebrated on Mt. Sinai.⁴ That is why the liberation of the Exodus cannot be reduced to a liberation which is principally or exclusively political in nature. Moreover, it is significant that the term *freedom* is often replaced in Scripture by the very closely related term, *redemption*.

4. The foundational episode of the *Exodus* will never be effaced from the memory of Israel. Reference is made to it when, after the [p. 120](#) destruction of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon, the Jewish people lived in the hope of a new liberation and, beyond that, awaited a definitive liberation. In this experience God is recognized as the Liberator. He will enter into a new Covenant with His people. It will be marked by the gift of His Spirit and the conversion of hearts.⁵

5. The anxieties and multiple sufferings sustained by those who are faithful to the God of the Covenant provide the theme of several Psalms: laments, appeals for help and thanksgivings all make mention of religious salvation and liberation. In this context, suffering is not purely and simply equated with the social condition of poverty or with the condition of the one who is undergoing political oppression. It also includes the hostility of one's enemies, injustice, failure and death. The Psalms call us back to an essential religious experience: it is from God alone that one can expect salvation and healing. God, and not man, has the power to change the situations of suffering. Thus the 'poor of the Lord' live in a total and confident reliance upon the loving providence of God.⁶ Moreover, throughout the whole crossing of the desert, the Lord did not fail to provide for the spiritual liberation and purification of his people.

6. In the Old Testament, the prophets after Amos keep affirming with particular vigour the requirements of justice and solidarity and the need to pronounce a very severe judgment on the rich who oppress the poor. They come to the defence of the widow and the orphan. They threaten the powerful: the accumulation of evils can only lead to terrible punishments.

Faithfulness to the Covenant cannot be conceived of without the practice of justice. Justice as regards God and justice as regards mankind are inseparable. God is the defender and the liberator of the poor.

7. These requirements are found once again in the New Testament. They are even more radicalized as can be shown in the discourse on the *Beatitudes*. Conversion and renewal have to occur in the de the heart.

8. Already proclaimed in the Old Testament, the commandment of fraternal love extended to all mankind thus provides the supreme rule of social life.⁷ There are no

⁴ Cf. [Ex. 24](#).

⁵ cf. [Jr. 31, 31-34](#); [Ex. 36, 26ff](#).

⁶ Cf. [Ze. 3:12ff](#).

⁷ Cf. [Dt. 10, 18-19](#).

discriminations or limitations which can counter the recognition of everyone as *neighbour*.⁸

9. Poverty for the sake of the kingdom is praised. And in the figure [p. 121](#) of the poor, we are led to recognize the mysterious presence of the Son of Man who became poor himself for love of us.⁹ This is the foundation of the inexhaustible words of Jesus on the judgment in [Mt. 25:31–46](#). Our Lord is one with all in distress; every distress is marked by his presence.

10. At the same time, the requirements of justice and mercy, already proclaimed in the Old Testament, are deepened to assume a new significance in the New Testament. Those who suffer or who are persecuted are identified with Christ.¹⁰ The perfection that Jesus demands of His disciples ([Mt. 5:18](#)) consists in the obligation to be merciful ‘as your heavenly Father is merciful’ ([Lk. 6:36](#)).

11. It is in light of the Christian vocation to fraternal love and mercy that the rich are severely reminded of their duty.¹¹ St. Paul, faced with the disorders of the Church of Corinth, forcefully emphasizes the bond which exists between participation in the sacrament of love and sharing with the brother in need.¹²

12. New Testament revelation teaches us that sin is the greatest evil, since it strikes man in the heart of his personality. The first liberation, to which all others must make reference, is that from sin.

13. Unquestionably, it is to stress the radical character of the deliverance brought by Christ and offered to all, be they politically free or slaves, that the New Testament does not require some change in the political or social condition as a prerequisite for entrance into this freedom. However, the *Letter to Philemon* shows that the new freedom procured by the grace of Christ should necessarily have effects on the social level.

14. Consequently, the full ambit of sin, whose first effect is to introduce disorder into the relationship between God and man, cannot be restricted to ‘social sin’. The truth is that only a correct doctrine of sin will permit us to insist on the gravity of its social effects.

15. Nor can one localize evil principally or uniquely in bad social, political or economic ‘structures’ as though all other evils came from them so that the creation of the ‘new man’ would depend on the establishment of different economic and socio-political structures. To be sure, there are structures which are evil and which cause evil and which we must have the courage to change. Structures, whether they are good or bad, are the result of man’s actions and so are consequences more than causes. The root of evil, then, lies in free and [p. 122](#) responsible persons who have to be converted by the grace of Jesus Christ in order to live and act as new creatures in the love of neighbour and in the effective search for justice, self-control and the exercise of virtue.¹³

To demand first of all a radical revolution in social relations and then to criticize the search for personal perfection is to set out on a road which leads to the denial of the meaning of the person and his transcendence, and to destroying ethics and its foundation which is the absolute character of the distinction between good and evil. Moreover, since

⁸ Cf. Lc. 10, 25–27.

⁹ cf. [2 Co. 9](#).

¹⁰ cf. [Mt. 25, 31–46](#); [Ac. 9, 4–5](#); [Col. 1, 24](#).

¹¹ Cf. [Jm. 5ff](#).

¹² Cf. [1 Co. 11, 17–34](#).

¹³ Cf. [Jm. 2, 14–26](#).

charity is the principle of authentic perfection, that perfection cannot be conceived without an openness to others and a spirit of service.

V THE VOICE OF THE MAGISTERIUM

1. In order to answer the challenge levelled at our times by oppression and hunger, the Church's Magisterium has frequently expressed her desire to awaken Christian consciences to a sense of justice, social responsibility and solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, and to highlight the present urgency of the doctrine and imperatives contained in Revelation.

2. We would like to mention some of these interventions here: the papal documents *Mater et magistra*, *Pacem in terris*, *Populorum progressio*, and *Evangelii nuntiandi*. We should likewise mention the letter to Cardinal Roy, *Octogesima adveniens*.

3. The Second Vatican Council in turn confronted the questions of justice and liberty in the Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et spes*.

4. On a number of occasions, the Holy Father has emphasized these themes, in particular in the encyclicals *Redemptor hominis*, *Dives in misericordia*, and *Laborem exercens*. These numerous addresses recall the doctrine of the rights of man and touch directly on the problems of the liberation of the human person in the face of the diverse kinds of oppression of which he is the victim. It is especially important to mention in this connection the Address given before the 26th General Assembly of the United Nations in New York, October 2, 1979.¹⁴ On January 28 of that same year, while opening the Third Conference of CELAM in Puebla, John Paul II affirmed that the complete truth about man is the basis for any real liberation.¹⁵ This p. 123 text is a document which bears directly upon the theology of liberation.

5. Twice the *Synod of Bishops* treated subjects which are directly related to a Christian conception of liberation: in 1971, justice in the world, and in 1974, the relationship between freedom from oppression and full freedom, or the salvation of mankind. The work of the Synods of 1971 and 1974 led Paul VI in his Apostolic Constitution *Evangelii nuntiandi* to clarify the connection between evangelization and human liberation or advancement.¹⁶

6. The concern for the Church for liberation and for human advancement was also expressed in the establishment of the Pontifical Commission, *Justice and Peace*.

7. Numerous national Episcopal Conferences have joined the Holy See in recalling the urgency of authentic human liberation and the routes by which to achieve it. In this context, special mention should be made of the documents of the General Conferences of the Latin American episcopate at Medellin in 1968 and at Puebla in 1979.

Paul VI was present at the Medellin Conference and John Paul II was at Puebla. Both dealt with the themes of conversion and liberation.

8. Following Paul VI, who had insisted on the distinctive character of the Gospel message,¹⁷ a character which is of divine origin, John Paul II, in his address at Puebla,

¹⁴ Cf. AAS 71 (1979) pp. 1144–1160.

¹⁵ Cf. AAS 71 (1979) p. 196.

¹⁶ Cf. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 25–33, AAS 68 (1976) pp. 23–28.

¹⁷ Cf. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 32, AAS 68 (1976) p. 27.

recalled the three pillars upon which any authentic theology of liberation will rest: *truth about Jesus Christ, truth about the Church, and truth about mankind*.¹⁸

VI A NEW INTERPRETATION OF CHRISTIANITY

1. It is impossible to overlook the immense amount of selfless work done by Christians, pastors, priests, religious or laypersons, who, driven by a love for their brothers and sisters living in inhuman conditions, have endeavoured to bring help and comfort to countless people in the distress brought about by poverty. Among these, some have tried to find the most effective means to put a quick end to the intolerable situation.

2. The zeal and the compassion which should dwell in the hearts of all pastors nevertheless run the risk of being led astray and diverted to works which are just as damaging to man and his dignity as is the poverty which is being fought, if one is not sufficiently attentive to certain temptations. p. 124

3. The feeling of anguish at the urgency of the problems cannot make us lose sight of what is essential nor forget the reply of Jesus to the Tempter: 'It is not on bread alone that man lives, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God' ([Mt. 4:4](#); cf. [Dt. 8:3](#)).

Faced with the urgency of sharing bread, some are tempted to put evangelization into parentheses, as it were, and postpone it until tomorrow: first the bread, then the Word of the Lord. It is a fatal error to separate these two and even worse to oppose the one to the other. In fact, the Christian perspective naturally shows they have a great deal to do with one another.¹⁹

4. To some it even seems that the necessary struggle for human justice and freedom in the economic and political sense constitutes the whole essence of salvation. For them, the Gospel is reduced to a purely earthly gospel.

5. The different theologies of liberation are situated between the *preferential option for the poor*, forcefully reaffirmed without ambiguity after Medellin at the Conference of *Puebla*²⁰ on the one hand, and the temptation to reduce the Gospel to an earthly gospel on the other.

6. We should recall that the preferential option described at *Puebla* is two-fold: for the poor and *for the young*.²¹ It is significant that the option for the young has in general been passed over in total silence.

7. We noted above (cf. 3) that an authentic theology of liberation will be one which is rooted in the Word of God, correctly interpreted.

8. But from a descriptive standpoint, it helps to speak of *theologies* of liberation, since the expression embraces a number of theological positions, or even sometimes ideological ones, which are not simply different but more often incompatible with one another.

9. In this present document, we will only be discussing developments of that current of thought which, under the name 'theology of liberation', proposes a novel interpretation of both the content of faith and of Christian existence which seriously departs from the faith of the Church and, in fact, actually constitutes a practical negation.

10. Concepts uncritically borrowed from marxist ideology and recourse to theses of a biblical hermeneutic marked by rationalism are at the basis of the new interpretation

¹⁸ Cf. AAS 71 (1979) pp. 188–196.

¹⁹ Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 39; Pius XI, *Quadragesimo anno*: AAS 23 (1931) p. 207.

²⁰ Cf. n. 1134–1165 and n. 1166–1205.

²¹ Cf. *Doc. de Puebla*, IV, 2.

which is corrupting whatever was authentic in the generous initial commitment on behalf of the poor.

VII MARXIST ANALYSIS

1. Impatience and a desire for results has led certain Christians, [P. 125](#) despairing of every other method, to turn to what they call 'marxist analysis'.

2. Their reasoning is this: an intolerable and explosive situation requires *effective action* which cannot be put off. Effective action presupposes a *scientific analysis* of the structural causes of poverty. Marxism now provides us with the means to make such an analysis, they say. Then one simply has to apply the analysis to the third-world situation, especially in Latin America.

3. It is clear that scientific knowledge of the situation and of the possible strategies for the transformation of society is a presupposition for any plan capable of attaining the ends proposed. It is also a proof of the seriousness of the effort.

4. But the term 'scientific' exerts an almost mythical fascination even though everything called 'scientific' is not necessarily scientific at all. That is why the borrowing of a method of approach to reality should be preceded by a careful epistemological critique. This preliminary critical study is missing from more than one 'theology of liberation'.

5. In the human and social sciences it is well to be aware above all of the plurality of methods and viewpoints, each of which reveals only one aspect of reality which is so complex that it defies simple and univocal explanation.

6. In the case of marxism, in the particular sense given to it in this context, a preliminary critique is all the more necessary since the thought of Marx is such a global vision of reality that all data received from observation and analysis are brought together in a philosophical and ideological structure, which predetermines the significance and importance to be attached to them. The ideological principles come prior to the study of the social reality and are presupposed in it. Thus no separation of the parts of this epistemologically unique complex is possible. If one tries to take only one part, say, the analysis, one ends up having to accept the entire ideology. That is why it is not uncommon for the ideological aspects to be predominant among the things which the 'theologians of liberation' borrow from marxist authors.

7. The warning of Paul VI remains fully valid today: marxism as it is actually lived out poses many distinct aspects and questions for Christians to reflect upon and act on. However, it would be 'illusory and dangerous to ignore the intimate bond which radically unites them, and to accept elements of the marxist analysis without recognizing its connections with the ideology, or to enter into the practice of class-struggle and of its marxist interpretation while failing [p. 126](#) to see the kind of totalitarian society to which this process slowly leads'.²²

8. It is true that marxist thought ever since its origins, and even more so lately, has become divided and has given birth to various currents which diverge significantly from one another. To the extent that they remain fully marxist, these currents continue to be based on certain fundamental tenets which are not compatible with the Christian conception of humanity and society. In this context, certain formulas are not neutral, but keep the meaning they had in the original marxist doctrine. This is the case with the 'class-struggle'. This expression remains pregnant with the interpretation that Marx gave it, so it cannot be taken as the equivalent of 'severe social conflict', in an empirical sense. Those

²² Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, n. 34, AAS 63 (1971) pp. 424-425.

who use similar formulas, while claiming to keep only certain elements of the marxist analysis and yet to reject this analysis taken as a whole, maintain at the very least a serious confusion in the minds of their readers.

9. Let us recall the fact that atheism and the denial of the human person, his liberty and his rights, are at the core of the marxist theory. This theory, then, contains errors which directly threaten the truths of the faith regarding the eternal destiny of individual persons. Moreover, to attempt to integrate into theology an analysis whose criterion of interpretation depends on this atheistic conception is to involve oneself in terrible contradictions. What is more, this misunderstanding of the spiritual nature of the person leads to a total subordination of the person to the collectivity, and thus to the denial of the principles of a social and political life which is in keeping with human dignity.

10. A critical examination of the analytical methods borrowed from other disciplines must be carried out in a special way by theologians. It is the light of faith which provides theology with its principles. That is why the use of philosophical positions or of human sciences by the theologian has a value which might be called instrumental, but yet must undergo a critical study from a theological perspective. In other words, the ultimate and decisive criterion for truth can only be a criterion which is itself theological. It is only in the light of faith, and what faith teaches us about the truth of man and the ultimate meaning of his destiny, that one can judge the validity or degree of validity of what other disciplines propose, often rather conjecturally, as being the truth about man, his history and his destiny. p. 127

11. When modes of interpretation are applied to the economic, social and political reality of today, which are themselves borrowed from marxist thought, they can give the initial impression of a certain plausibility to the degree that the present-day situation in certain countries is similar to what Marx described and interpreted in the middle of the last century. On the basis of these similarities, certain simplifications are made which, abstracting from specific essential factors, prevent any really rigorous examination of the causes of poverty and prolong the confusion.

12. In certain parts of Latin America, the seizure of the major part of the wealth by an oligarchy of owners bereft of social consciousness, the practical absence or the shortcomings of a rule of law, military dictators making a mockery of elementary human rights, the corruption of certain powerful officials and the savage practices of some foreign capital interests constitute factors which nourish a passion for revolt among those who thus consider themselves the powerless victims of a new colonialism in the technological, financial, monetary or economic order. The recognition of injustice is accompanied by a *pathos* which borrows its language from marxism, wrongly presented as though it were scientific language.

13. The first condition for any analysis is a total openness to the reality to be described. That is why a critical consciousness has to accompany the use of any working hypotheses that are being adopted. One has to realize that these hypotheses correspond to a particular viewpoint which will inevitably highlight certain aspects of the reality while leaving others in the shade. This limitation which derives from the nature of human science is ignored by those who, under the guise of hypotheses recognized as such, have recourse to such an all-embracing conception of reality as the thought of Karl Marx.

VIII SUBVERSION OF THE MEANING OF TRUTH AND VIOLENCE

1. This all-embracing conception thus imposes its logic and leads the 'theologies of liberation' to accept a series of positions which are incompatible with the Christian vision of humanity. In fact, the ideological core borrowed from marxism, which we are referring

to, exercises the function of a *determining principle*. It has this role in virtue of its being described as '*scientific*', that is to say, true of necessity.

In this core, we can distinguish several components.

2. According to the logic of marxist thought, the 'analysis' is inseparable from the *praxis*, and from the conception of history to p.128 which this *praxis* is linked. The analysis is for the marxist an instrument of criticism, and criticism is only one stage in the revolutionary struggle. This struggle is that of the proletarian class, invested with its mission in history.

3. Consequently, for the marxist, only those who engage in the struggle can work out the analysis correctly.

4. The only true consciousness, then, is the *partisan* consciousness.

It is clear that the concept of *truth* itself is in question here, and it is totally subverted: there is no truth, they pretend, except in and through the partisan *praxis*.

5. For the marxist, the *praxis*, and the truth that comes from it, are partisan *praxis* and truth because the fundamental structure of history is characterized by *class-struggle*. There follows, then, the objective necessity to enter into the class struggle, which is the dialectical opposite of the relationship of exploitation, which is being condemned. For the marxist, the truth is a truth of class: there is no truth but the truth in the struggle of the revolutionary class.

6. The fundamental law of history, which is the law of the class struggle, implies that society is founded on violence. To the violence which constitutes the relationship of the domination of the rich over the poor, there corresponds the counter-violence of the revolution, by means of which this domination will be reserved.

7. The class struggle is presented as an objective, necessary law. Upon entering this process on behalf of the oppressed, one 'makes' truth, one acts '*scientifically*'. Consequently, the conception of the truth goes hand in hand with the affirmation of necessary violence, and so, of a political amorality. Within this perspective, any reference to ethical requirements calling for courageous and radical institutional and structural reforms makes no sense.

8. The fundamental law of class struggle has a global and universal character. It is reflected in all the spheres of existence: religious, ethical, cultural and institutional. As far as this law is concerned, none of these spheres is autonomous. In each of them this law constitutes the determining element.

9. In particular, the very nature of ethics is radically called into question because of the borrowing of these theses from marxism. In fact, it is the transcendent character of the distinction between good and evil, the principle of morality, which is implicitly denied in the perspective of the class struggle. p.129

A Christian Understanding of Liberation

Andrew Kirk

This article is one of three Abraham Malpan Memorial lectures given at the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary in Kottayam, South India. The other two were entitled, 'The Bible and the Oppressed' and 'Acceptance and Opposition'. They were published by The Christian

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(Editor)

There are many ways of describing the essence and driving force of Western societies today. Many commentators would say that the most obvious aspect of the life of most people, even when this is not fully recognized, is their devotion (in the religious sense) to 'freedom'. Successive revolutions since the end of the 18th century have reinforced the belief that human happiness is to be measured fundamentally by the degree of personal freedom which each individual is able to achieve. In the debate about human rights, for example, people in the Western nations assume naturally that it is civil liberties that are being talked about: freedom from undue constraint by the State; freedom to own private property; freedom to buy and sell in the market place; freedom to choose a particular kind of education for one's children; freedom to travel; freedom to terminate pregnancies and freedom to have sexual relationships with members of the same sex. The latest freedom which seems to be on the horizon already is that of being able to do all one's household transactions, and a lot of office work, by computer from one's house. We might call this last freedom, the freedom not to have to converse with people!

There is a sense in which this concept of freedom is linked to advances in modern technology (e.g. the realm of fertilization in the field of medical science). Likewise oppression is easily understood as that which modern science is able to liberate us from: the drudgery and monotony of life and physical disabilities.

Without doubting the many, lasting, beneficial uses to which scientific discovery has and can be put, the Western notion of freedom is largely an illusion—a chasing of shadows—for, in many ways, Western peoples have lost the art of *being* human. Life (as in the parable which Jesus told) tends to be measured by the abundance of things which are possessed. Perhaps, it would not be too far fetched to suggest that the only real freedom people actually have is that of choosing which bondage they are going to live under. This conclusion [p. 130](#) should not be taken as a desire to detract from technological knowledge as such—for physical and spiritual freedom ought not to be set against one another—rather it is a warning against an increasingly narrow definition of what it means to be human, the result of the loss in the West of any firm base for moral and spiritual values.

In many parts of the Third World there ascends up from 'the wretched of the earth' a cry for freedom. There is no illusion here! Where life consists of a 24 hour struggle to exist, personal and social freedoms take on a wholly different meaning. People living under the daily constraints of physical necessity feel deeply that the whole of life is being subordinated to a set of structures or circumstances (in a quasi-religious sense) over which they have absolutely no control. Life is a matter of survival within a system which is controlled by others, ultimately hostile to their interests: a political mafia, a military caucus, the international banking system, landlords, middle-men. At the bottom of the heap in society it looks very much as if the whole of existence is the result of an inextricable fate working itself out. Such a view is at the opposite end of the spectrum from the belief that life is about the freedom of choice.

In spite of the fact that the vast majority of humankind has to toil in circumstances of poverty and oppression, the longing and demand for freedom is never wholly extinguished. There are substantial reasons therefore, for affirming that the main characteristic of our modern world, despite all the counter signs, is that it is intoxicated with the idea of freedom and incensed against every form of oppression (whether real, or imagined). Ruben Alves, a Brazilian theologian and sociologist, captures well the modern mood:

‘Man is free for the simple things of life ... Free to chat, to drink and eat, to remain inactive in pure contemplation, to enjoy the sex game, to play. He is liberated for humour, which exists only when man does not take himself too seriously, when he is not dominated by messianic obsessions about his power to create history ... Man is free, even to live in captivity, without either losing the erotic sense of life because of the frustration of a future made closed, or without becoming drunk by eroticism as a compensation for the loss of future’ (*A Theology of Human Hope*, p. 157).

THE INFLUENCE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY ON CHRISTIAN THINKING

The essential emphasis of Liberation Theology as a Christian reflection on freedom and liberation has been that human liberation is of one piece. Liberation, as it effects human beings, cannot be divided into an inner and an outer realm. In this sense, it has become a protest against **P. 131** the long tradition of thought in both the West and the East that attitudes and intentions can be substitutes for actual change in society. It is also a powerful protest against the churches for making liberation into something purely individual, internal, otherworldly and future. The effect of the dichotomy between the inner and the outer realm of life has been to divorce faith from political action.

José Miguez calls this belief a Hellenistic view of liberation: ‘... the emancipation of the soul from the cares, appetites, and ambitions of the body and the world, in order to be dedicated to contemplation and communion with God’.

Moreover, he accuses modern theology of perpetuating this ‘internal and individual concept of liberation by linking liberation ... to the integration of man with the universe of moral values ... to the emancipation of the spirit ... to a flight from ‘the objective’ from the world of things ... to a world where objective reality can be explained, dissolved or ignored in mental and mystical processes’ (*Theology and Liberation*, *I.R.M.* 61, 2411 Jan. 1972, pp. 68–69).

It is a firm conviction of Liberation Theology that it is by a judicial, not uncritical, use of the Marxist understanding of the way in which societies work that one may come to a more complete perspective on liberation.

Firstly, liberation is not either an explanation of a reality or the future projection of a theoretical ideal, rather it is a project—something that has to be worked for by stages with sacrifice and determination.

Secondly, liberation has to do with the whole of human life and with every human being. No-one can be free until all are free. My personal liberation can only be achieved in the liberation of others. The first, in some circumstances, may be just as difficult to realize as the second—to quote José Miguez again:

‘The project of liberation embraces the interests of all because it offers to all better possibilities of human fulfilment. But the ideology of oppression hides this reality from the dominant classes and hardens them in their resistance to change. Hence the importance of the de-ideologizing task.’ (*Toward a Christian Political Ethics*, London, SCM Press, 1983 p. 108).

Thirdly, Marxism is both a useful tool to analyse concrete slaveries in the political and economic spheres from which human beings need liberating and also a programme for action. Nevertheless, it is ultimately insufficient, for it does not consider the reality of man’s alienation from God, who is the only true foundation and meaning of existence. As a result Marxism distorts as well as clarifies the total dynamic of human history and relationships between different sectors of society. **p. 132**

Fourthly, full liberation is reconciliation with God through, and by means of, the historic work of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ within, and only within, the concrete conditions of human existence. Liberation is the freeing of the whole of life from its basic contradictions, antagonisms and divisions, in order that it might become what God intends it to be.

LIBERATION AND THE MESSAGE OF THE SCRIPTURES

Unquestionably, liberation is one of the key themes of the Bible. One of the leading New Testament scholars of this generation, F. F. Bruce, has called the Apostle Paul, 'the Apostle of Freedom'. Within the Pauline writings the key conviction is that 'Christ set us free, to be free people ...' ([Gal. 5:1](#)). There is a freedom which can only be measured by the scope of Christ's sacrifice for sin and his conquest of death.

The starting-point for understanding the biblical view of liberation is its analysis of the human predicament of oppression (which we looked at earlier). The biblical writers have their explanations of the causes of human misery. In my opinion these are just as valid a statement of reality, which can be observed empirically, as those provided by secular sociology or economic analysis. The biblical perspective (we may call it a theological analysis, if we like) has its own internally consistent methodology and is intrinsically open to verification.

If Paul has a great vision of the liberation which is possible in Christ he is also thoroughly realistic about the causes of its absence. To grasp his in-depth understanding of the problem we should begin where he himself begins to develop the meaning and scope of the Gospel, [Rom. 1:18f.](#): 'The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against every form of godlessness (*asebeia*) and injustice (*adikia*) practised by men who suppress the truth by their injustice.'

This is a magnificently condensed statement of the nature and consequences of sin. The passage which follows is possibly a commentary (technically, a midrash) on the account of the fall of Adam and Eve. Let us notice some of the pertinent arguments:

(a) The fundamental human predicament is ungodliness (*asebeia*). This is later identified as idolatry ([Rom. 1:21-23](#)). Idolatry is, briefly, a decision not to recognize that the world belongs to God, and positively to substitute other created objects as a focus of worship and service. It is a displacement or refashioning of one's understanding of God and his replacement with another object of devotion or [p. 133](#) dedication. This *exchange* is the fundamental cause of all oppression; it is the bottom line, as it were, in one's explanation of the cause of every kind of ill-treatment of some human beings by others. It is, therefore, also the place where authentic human liberation has to begin. Equivocation at this point leads to a superficial assessment of the possibilities of liberation throughout society and the spinning of unnecessary and often dangerous illusions concerning change.

(b) The most fundamental consequence flowing from the decision to exchange the truth of God for a fabrication of human ingenuity is that all human reasoning and emotional life has become warped and twisted. Both in theory and in practice humankind has bartered a God-centred view of reality for one centred on only one aspect of life. In political terms, this one reality may be freedom, justice, revolution, order, democracy or the class-struggle. The human view then becomes elevated to the level of an absolute verity, usually substantiated by an appeal to one religious value or another (creation, nature, law, kingdom) or to a 'scientific' explanation of society and its workings. Paul has no hesitation in calling this whole process one of 'exchanging the truth of God for a lie ...' (the lie about which we spoke earlier). We might say that, insofar as human beings refuse

to recognize with seriousness the self-manifestation of the God and Father of Jesus Christ, their perception of the world is bound to be distorted at every level.

(c) As a result of faulty reasoning and a corrupt emotional life many other important, negative consequences flow. Paul describes these in terms of the perverted human relationships which were typical of the Gentile world of the first century. We might well use the word 'oppression' in its individual, political and economic dimensions to cover the list of shameful acts given in [Rom. 1:29–31](#). The result of corruption is the destruction of human life in all its aspects (v. [27](#)), summed up by the one word 'death' (v. [32](#))—God's final judgement on human beings as they remain in their stubborn unbelief.

(d) Human beings find themselves caught in a vicious circle: the more they believe the fundamental lie about reality, the more they practise a perverted form of existence, the more they believe the lie—'they suppress the truth by their injustice' (v. [18](#)).

This passage from Romans gives us, then, the substance of Paul's analysis of the human predicament. At one level it is clearly a matter of belief (a faith-commitment) that this analysis is true. At another level, that of practice, verification is possible as a matter of observation of normal human behaviour. Idolatry is a fundamental, diagnostic tool for explaining the meaning and dynamic of oppression in all its forms. [p. 134](#)

The fulness of liberation arises out of a correct assessment of both the causes and the symptoms of oppression. The means of liberation are set out in the whole letter to the Romans, and in particular in chapter [8](#). The conclusion of Paul's writings, as indeed the whole of the New Testament, is that liberation is impossible without redemption. A price has to be paid to atone for both sin (idolatry) and sins (injustices and oppressions). Human beings cannot pay the price themselves, either by moral earnestness, political action or compassion for the distressed. Only the Son of God, totally free of all idolatry and injustice, could atone, by becoming a sin offering ([Rom. 8:3](#)). The New Testament is totally realistic in recognizing that this view of basic liberation is a scandal to those who possess power, wisdom, authority and status and to those who trust in their religious rites and practices ([1 Cor. 1:18ff.](#)). The message of the Gospel is, as we say, totally unacceptable, to those who are not poor or poor in spirit.

Liberation is one model of salvation in the New Testament. It speaks of freedom from the authority and power of the law, sin, the powers and, eventually, of death itself. It is far from being an abstract ideal. It needs to become a concrete reality at every level of human existence. As José Miguez has eloquently argued, it manifests itself in love, reconciliation and justice—each one the practical embodiment of 'doing the truth':

'true love cannot remain as intention, in the abstract: it demands to be made concrete. However, in order to do this one must choose a way to concretize it ... When love is confronted with human need in its widest sense, it must choose a strategy ... and become involved in forms of organization' (*Room to be People*, p. 63).

'Reconciliation means in the Bible not the ignoring or explaining away of the contradiction, but its effective removal.... The differences are not conciliated in the new fellowship, but are overcome through repentance and conversion and the creation of a new man. The "new age". does not coexist pacifically with the "old age" but engages in a death struggle. Reconciliation is ... achieved ... through the defeat of the old and the victory of the new age' (*Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Age*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1975, p. 120).

There are two issues which still remain for consideration. Each has generated a certain amount of controversy among Christians. We mention them, though we are not able to resolve all the tensions which exist in each case.

The first issue concerns the relationship between the view of the Old and New Testaments concerning liberation. It is often claimed that the Old Testament has a concept

of salvation which is rooted in this [p. 135](#) present world, whereas the New Testament speaks of a final salvation beyond the end of this world order. It is further stated that the New Testament is not concerned fundamentally with liberation in social terms, but only within personal relationships. Finally, many would argue that God's people existed as a nation in the Old Testament, and that as a consequence, interest is centred upon freedom and order in political terms, whereas in the New Testament the Church, a universal and non-political body, replaces Israel. The Church is a spiritual fellowship, not a political agency.

There is some truth in these assertions. However, they are often exaggerated and frequently wrong conclusions are drawn from right premises. Because of the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ the New Testament is conscious of the defeat of death. Death is no longer to be considered the end of human existence, but the transition to a new realm of living. Nevertheless, the new age is portrayed in material terms. Moreover, liberation in the New Testament is clearly offered to all peoples, without discrimination or favouritism, no longer to the members of one nation alone. It is, therefore, entirely separate from any ideas of race or tribalism. At the same time, it is inseparable from belonging to a new universal family, which is essentially inter-racial and inter-cultural. Nevertheless, liberation has to be worked out within this new grouping, whose motto is 'Jesus Christ is Lord', in such a way that every kind of political and cultural assumption and division is challenged. It is vitally important to bear in mind that the 'enemies' that Christ told his disciples to love unconditionally were political and national ones. Liberation may not be directly equated with any particular political action—all of which is ambiguous in terms of the final liberation of the kingdom—; nevertheless, it has extensive political implications.

The second issue concerns the dilemma as to whether it is any longer true to say that *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the church there is no salvation). This is a controversial issue. Dogmatic statements which seem to be rigidly exclusivist do not tone well with modern notions of tolerance and pluralism. They seem to be arrogant, unnecessarily provocative and in danger of inducing a fatal spiritual pride. The difficulty is enhanced by the modern individualistic notion of salvation. Salvation is the result of an individual's search for the truth of God, and is expressed in terms of a one-to-one relationship with the Saviour.

I do not believe, however, that we can allow such a restricted view of salvation. There is a real sense in which there is no salvation outside the church, for God's purpose of salvation is to form a new kind of [p.136](#) community. It is true that Christian opinion down the ages has tended to oscillate between individual and institutional notions of salvation. In the first case everything seems to depend on the individual and his initiative, salvation is the result of individual free-enterprise and risk-taking. In the second case everything depends upon the institution. The Church takes care of the relationship. Salvation is the result of having paid one's contributions to a welfare system. Needless to say, both models are entirely inadequate. The New Testament uses organic models to describe the new corporate reality which God is creating—body, family, race, people. God's purposes of salvation only begin with the individual being reconciled to his creator. His ultimate plan is to remake humanity in the context of creating new social structures and relationships. The good news of the Gospel is not that a private salvation is available to those who feel their need of it, but that God is reconciling together peoples who have been divided by walls of hostility and fear. The death and resurrection of the Messiah has, as its end product, the causing of hitherto antagonistic groups to belong to one another ([Eph. 2:14, 16; 3:6](#)). Belonging can only be expressed in a community. That community is the Church. In this sense there is no salvation outside the Church. Liberation has to express itself in

wholly new kinds of human relationships: it needs, therefore, a social context in which to do it.

I understand this reality, not so much as a matter of spiritual pride, or the basis for a false assurance, but as an amazing gift of God and a demand that what is a potential reality by God's grace become a fact through our collaboration.

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Black Theology

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I BLACK THEOLOGY: ITS ORIGIN

While it may be admitted that black theology was made prominent by writers of the 1960s and 1970s, the roots of black theology go further back in history. Marcus Garvey (1887–1940), a strong Jamaican advocate of black religion is regarded by many as the apostle of black theology in the United States of America. Ferm describes him as a forerunner of the Black Muslim and other black protest movements in America, who advocated a black God and a black Jesus.¹ The brilliant Civil Rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr., concedes that Garvey was indeed the apostle of black religion. Speaking at Garvey's memorial shrine in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1965, King is quoted by Drake as saying:

'Marcus Garvey was the first man of colour in the history of the United States to lead and develop a mass movement ... He was the first man on a mass scale and level to give millions of Negroes a sense of dignity and destiny, and make the Negro feel he is somebody.'²

Marcus Garvey was a religious teacher. Garvey's concept of God may not have been as radical as his more recent counterparts, yet one cannot fail to see an intimation of black theology in his teachings. Garvey is quoted by Burkett as saying:

'Whilst our God has no colour, yet it is human to see everything through one's own spectacles, and since the white people have seen their God through white spectacles, we have only started out (late though it be) to see our God through our own spectacles ... We Negroes believe in the God of Ethiopia, the everlasting God—God the Father, God the Son

¹ Dean W. Ferm, *Contemporary American Theologies* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), p. 41.

² Clair Drake, Foreword to *Garveyism As a Religious Movement* by Randall Burkett (Metuchen, N.J. & London: Scarecrow Press, 1978), p. 15.

and God the Holy Ghost, the one God of all ages. That is the God in whom we believe, but we shall worship Him through the spectacles of Ethiopia.’³

Although Garvey was perhaps the foremost apostle of black theology, this does not mean that he was the first black leader to champion the cause of liberation for the Black race. Nat Turner (1800–1831) not p. 138 only preached liberation but actually led a revolt that shook the foundation of slavery.

Unlike their counterparts in the Caribbean who were integrated into the society relatively soon after the abolition of slavery, the American blacks were faced with the monster of racial segregation. Segregation, the twin-evil-companion of slavery, held iron grip on the Negroes of America for over three centuries. They were barred from certain schools and colleges, restaurants, hotels and public sanitary conveniences. They were confined to certain sections (usually the rear) of public transport and places of worship.

It is an embarrassing fact of history that the Christian Church, generally referred to as the conscience of the nation, not only condoned but, for the most part, openly supported segregation. Columbus Sally observes that:

‘The White Southern Churches continued black subservience in the name of God. The (white) Protestant Churches ... were among the first groups to segregate after the Civil War and to accept racism as the basis of race relations.’⁴

Up to the late nineteenth century, no denomination openly resisted segregation. While the churches used God to justify segregation ‘they possessed no elaborate theology on the subject.’⁵ It was generally accepted, however, that ‘the Negro was a descendant of Ham, that he did have a soul, and that the Bible teaches brotherhood, but these did not add up to racial mixing.’⁶ One Southern Presbyterian Minister allegedly contended that ‘the colour line is distinctly drawn by God Himself ... and it would be a sin and crime to undertake to obliterate it.’⁷

Since the Christian Church was seen as having aided and abetted racial discrimination, some blacks have not only become suspicious of, but have also become openly hostile to the Church. ‘Historically, most black denominations were created in reaction to the blatant racism practised against blacks in white churches and so the fear now manifested in these denominations is understandable.’⁸

The hostility of blacks against the Church reached crisis proportion on May 4, 1969, when James Foreman interrupted the Sunday morning worship at New York’s Inter-racial Riverside Church, and p. 139 presented Black manifesto demands for that congregations’ share of \$500,000,000 from the United States white religious community.⁹

The continued effort on the part of some writers to promulgate white superiority and black inferiority has only served to widen the existing gap between the two races and to cause many blacks to reject Christianity.

³ Randall K. Burkett, *Garveyism As a Religious Movement*, p. 47.

⁴ W. E. Pannell, *My Friend the Enemy* (Texas: Word Books, 1968), p. 29.

⁵ David Reimers, *White Protestant and The Negro* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 29.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Robert S. Lecky & H. Elliot Wright (eds.), *Black Manifesto* (New York: Sheed & Ward Inc., 1969), p. 12.

Howard Jones refers to a Christian magazine in which were three pictures of skulls, one of a white man, one of a black man and another of an ape. The magazine attempted to show that the skull of the black man and the ape were similar and not like that of the white man. Jones correctly affirms that 'as long as white Christians write articles like this to degrade black people, more and more blacks will reject Christianity.'¹⁰

Embittered by the injustices suffered and disillusioned by the kind of Christianity he saw, Malcolm X, son of a Baptist preacher became a Black Muslim. The bombing of a black church in Birmingham, Alabama, a few years ago, where five Sunday school children lost their lives, convinced Angela Davis that there was no hope for blacks in American democracy, hence she turned to communism. Other blacks who encountered racism lost all hope and became anti-religious.

Howard Jones has remarked that:

'A small but significant number of Black Churches across America have completely abandoned the cardinal doctrines and practices of the Christian Religion. Embracing a black militant theology based upon certain portions of the Bible, and the philosophy of black writers, religious and non-religious, they seek their own identity. These churches seek to liberate the minds of the people from the brain-washing influence of what they term "Slavery Christianity". Consequently many blacks heed their message.'¹¹

The emergence of the black church was inevitable if the black race in America were to maintain their dignity as individuals and enjoy true liberty in conscientious worship. The emergence of a black theology was also inevitable if they were to consolidate their position in a white community and free themselves from the memory of their past.

II BLACK THEOLOGY: ITS TEACHINGS

A clear definition of black theology was issued in a statement by the National Committee of Black Churchmen (NCBC) in June 1969, which states in part that: **P. 140**

'Black Theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black conditions in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people.'¹²

The expression 'black theology is a theology of blackness' is consistent with the view of James Cone who says, 'there is no truth for and about people that does not emerge out of the context of their experience. Truth in this sense is black truth ...'¹³

God and Christ

Views concerning God vary considerably among black theologians. Cone's concept of God is one which allows God to appear as one who exists primarily as a vindicator of the poor and oppressed. He says:

¹⁰ Howard Jones, *White Questions to a Black Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), pp. 14, 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹² For the full statement see Wilmore Cone, *Black Theology* (New York: Orbiss Books, 1979), pp. 100–102.

¹³ James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), p. 17.

'God elected to be the God and Saviour to people oppressed and powerless ... His vindication is for the poor because they are defenceless before the wicked and powerful "My righteousness will vindicate your suffering".'¹⁴

Marcus Garvey perceives God as an impersonal being. Burkett quotes him as saying, 'there is a God and we believe in Him. He is not a person nor a physical being. He is a spirit and He is a universal intelligence.'¹⁵

A number of exponents of black theology explicitly affirm that God is black. James Cone, affirms

'The negative reaction of white theologians to the Black Christ is due almost exclusively to their witness, a cultural fact that makes it almost impossible for them to relate to anything black.'¹⁶

Commenting on the vicarious death of Jesus Christ, Clarence Hilliard says, 'Christ became blacker than black since He was made sin for us. And he died on the cross, a death reserved for the niggers of his day.'¹⁷

Marcus Garvey contends that Jesus was conceived historically as a Black man. He staged a ceremony for the canonization of Jesus Christ p. 141 as a Black Messiah, an act that sent 'shock waves' through American society. Commenting on this momentous event Burkett writes:

One of the most spectacular ceremonies which took place under Universal Negro Improvement Association auspices, and the event which probably caused more comment throughout the United States in both the white and black press than any other in Liberty Hall, was the divine service for the canonization of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Black Man of Sorrows and also the canonization of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a black woman.'¹⁸

By this single act, Garvey probably undercut whatever conservative views he had hitherto expressed relating to God's colour.

Human Suffering

It seems fair to say that Black Theology is rooted in the suffering of black humanity. Suffering in its various forms of poverty and social injustice is generally attributed to white racism, which, according to black advocates, enslaved and oppressed black people.

The constant reference to slavery and racist oppression is a noticeable trend in black theology. Although they have been legally freed from slavery, the blacks are constantly reminded of the emotional and psychological baggage carried over from slavery from which personal freedom is either unattainable or undesirable.

Black theology, therefore, is offered as a kind of panacea for the oppressed and suffering. It is against this background that black theology must be viewed as essentially a theology of liberation, liberation of the black race from oppression and social injustice.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 44–46.

¹⁵ Randell Burkett, *Garveyism As a Religious Movement* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1978), p. 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁷ Clarence Hilliard, 'Down with the Hunky Christ, Up With the Funky Christ', *Christianity Today*, V. 20.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53. The event is described in detail in Jacques Garvey, *Garvey and Garveyism*, pp. 139–142. In Edmond Cronon, *Black Moses*, pp. 179ff.

Sin and Man

Sin has been interpreted by some as a social dysfunction, economic and political oppression. The evil of slavery, segregation and the dehumanizing of the poor are highlighted as the major maladies of humankind. Black theology insists on the dignity of the black man and equal rights for him to exert his manhood. Garvey contends that by virtue of his being created in the image of God, man should not 'descend to the level of a peon, serf or a slave, but that he should always be a man in the fullest possession of his senses, and with the truest knowledge of himself.'¹⁹ It was this conviction of the intrinsic self-worth of man that motivated Martin Luther King, Junior, to lead the Civil Rights Movement. Elijah Muhammad, recognized among p. 142 Black Muslims as a prophet, contends that the first man was black. Unpopular though the concept may be, it is this belief that the original man was black that leads to the conclusion by some that God is black since he created man in His own image.

Salvation and Eschatology

Fundamental among the emphases in black theology is liberation—a word which is used synonymously with salvation. Salvation has come to mean deliverance from social and economic oppression. Hence there is an over-riding emphasis on human work and human effort, and a down-playing of divine help.

Among some black preachers Christianity and earthly freedom are presented as inseparable for the black man. White missionaries are criticized for what is termed 'extolling the virtues of the next world'. Cone rejects what he terms as the 'white lie' that the Christian is primarily concerned with life in the other world.

'If eschatology means that one believes that God is totally uninvolved in the suffering of man because he is preparing them for another world then black theology is not eschatological. Black theology has hope for this life. The appeal to the next life is a lack of hope ... Heavenly hope becomes a Platonic grasp for another reality because one cannot live meaningfully amid the suffering of this world.'²⁰

Violence and Racism

While advocates of black theology are united in the concept of liberation for the black man and oppressed, they are divided on the question of the means or method of achieving liberation. Influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. resorted to non-violence as a means of liberation. He insisted that 'returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars ... Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.'²¹

Not everyone upheld King's doctrine of non-violence. Some of his successors seem to have countenanced confrontation rather than peaceful demonstration. According to James Cone, liberation is 'emancipation of black people from white oppression by *whatever means* black people deem necessary.'²²

The militant and anti-white expressions so characteristic of the radical elements of black theology have attracted much criticism from p. 143 both white and black

¹⁹ R. K. Burkett, p. 56.

²⁰ James Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), p. 123.

²¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), p. 57.

²² James Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power*, p. 6.

theologians. Major Jones criticizes James Cone and Albert Cleage for what he terms 'too much dependence on the Black Power Movement which has encouraged a sense of hatred which stifles the human spirit.'²³

Among the more moderate exponents of black theology, violence and racism are rejected as the solution of the problem between blacks and whites. Deotis Roberts includes reconciliation between blacks and whites as an indispensable dimension of Christian liberation. He declares that we should seek 'a constructive, deeply motivated long-range, massive orientation in black-white relation.'²⁴

The man who stands out in his moderate teaching on non-violence and racial harmony not only in words but by his own lifestyle is unquestionably Martin Luther King Jr. Cleve Grant, a Jamaican minister of the Church of God, writes: 'He never carried a gun, not even a knife to defend himself. He had only his faith in God to rely on ...'²⁵

Under the most extenuating circumstances King demonstrated his commitment and belief in non-violence and thereby became immortalised as a hero of peace. Quoting Benjamin Maye, President of Morehouse College, Grant adds:

'King knew suffering; his house was bombed; he lived day by day for thirteen years under constant threats of death, maliciously accused of being a Communist; stabbed by a member of his own race, slugged in a hotel lobby; JAILED OVER TWENTY TIMES: often betrayed by friends; yet he displayed no rancour in his soul, no bitterness of heart, no revenge, no resentment, BUT went up and down the length of the world preaching nonviolence and the redemptive power of love.'²⁶

The Future Hope of Blacks

The very fabric into which black theology is interwoven is the dignity and hope of the Negroes. The question that needs to be faced however, and which black theology has not clearly addressed is: what constitutes the final victory of the Negro? To the early advocates of black theology the answer was emancipation from slavery. To the advocates from the turn of the century up to the late 1960s victory for the Negro was seen as liberation from racial segregation and injustice. Today the emphasis seems to be on liberation from the plight of poverty. A clear theology has not been articulated as to the means of achieving this goal nor is there reference to the machinery for the maintaining of said goals assuming that they are attained.

The feeling has been expressed by many blacks that as long as they remain in the white man's land they will not be truly free. As a result [p. 144](#) many have yearned to go back to Africa, their ancestral home, which to them epitomizes ultimate freedom.

Assuming that Africa was able to accommodate all the blacks who desire to go there, the question remains, would they be welcomed by Africans? The evidence from reports of those who have gone there and returned seems to point to the negative. As a basis for man's present peace and future hope, Christian theology teaches that a complete transformation of man's life is a fundamental prerequisite. Black theology has not emphasized the need for such a transformation. The emphasis seems to be on changing the system or the society or getting out of it.

²³ Major Jones, *Christian Ethics for Black Theology: The Politics of Liberation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), p. 194.

²⁴ Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), p. 20.

²⁵ Cleve Grant, 'We Won Many Battles Without A Gun', *The Star*, Jan. 16, 1979.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

III BLACK THEOLOGY ASSESSED

The Dignity of Man

Black theology places much emphasis on the dignity of man especially the black man whose rights were infringed by slavery and racism. The dignity of man is highlighted in scripture in the creation account. Because of the sacredness of human life, human sacrifice was forbidden and laws for the protection of human life were instituted. The same reason is used for the New Testament appeal to dedicate one's life to God and abstain from immorality ([Rom. 12:1, 2](#); [1 Cor. 6:19](#)) and subsequent punishment for desecrating the body, the human temple ([1 Cor. 6:19](#); [Rev. 21:8](#)).

The unity of the human race gives support to the dignity of every human being. The inferiority or superiority of any race or colour is unfounded in scripture. The apostle Paul speaks in favour of the unity and dignity of the human race when he says that from one man He (God) has made every nation of man that they should inhabit the earth ([Acts 17:26](#) NIV). Herein lies the ground for the repudiation of superiority of one race over another.

It should not be left to the politicians alone to speak out against social injustice; the Church's voice should be heard loud and clear in its condemnation of anything or anyone who violates human rights.

Rather than becoming cynical, the black man should strive to p. 145 develop his personality and potentials and get on with this business of living with a view of making this world a better place. Derek Webster has well stated that:

‘The potentials in man are usually for what is healthy and life giving, for what flees and looks to new questions. It can however be marred and twisted to serve ignoble ends. Man creates the most infamous death camps but it is also man who meets his end in them with the prayer of forgiveness on his lips for his torturers.’²⁷

The paradox of man expressed above only serves to highlight the biblical view of man and hence his need for transformation.

Concern for the Poor

The emphasis of black theology in helping the poor and oppressed is founded in both the Old and New Testaments. Amos spoke out with indignation against the inhumanity of those who sold the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes ([Amos 8:6](#)). Isaiah criticized the wealthy for oppressing the poor and weak ([Isa. 10:1-2](#)). God showed his concern for the poor when he initiated the jubilee principle to counteract the greedy monopoly of land ([Lev. 2:5](#)) and institute the seventh year rest of land for the benefit of the poor ([Ex. 23:10, 11](#)). The poor were not to be treated unjustly ([Ex. 23:3, 6](#)).

God—Liberator of Oppressed

Christians in general agree that God indeed is Liberator. The freedom He provides is for all men. Among radical advocates of black theology, God is liberator of the black race and therefore God is black. The Bible presents all as being in bondage to sin. Man has been taken captive by the Devil, the universal taskmaster. God sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world in the fullness of time to redeem or free man from his bondage. By His death on the

²⁷ Derek Webster, ‘Creativity Within Religious Education’, A Note Toward the Significance for Religious Education of Dialogue Between Christian Theology & Humanistic Psychology. *British Journal of Religious Education*, V. 2, No. 4 (Summer 1980), p. 133.

cross, Jesus became a ransom for all ([Matt. 20:28](#)). Moved with love and compassion, God came to redeem us.

Unfortunately the views of radicals, be they political or theological, generally get more publicity than those of moderates. Because of this, some positive points in black theology could be totally eclipsed by focusing on the radical negative elements. Some critics have questioned whether or not it is authentic to speak of a black theology. [p. 146](#)

How shall we Caribbean evangelical educators respond to black theology? A response is necessary. As Caribbean evangelicals we should respond to black theology because notwithstanding some positive things, it cuts across the grain of evangelical teaching on some fundamental issues.

While it may be true that black theology is not a present threat to the evangelical faith in the region, this is no reason why it should be swept under the carpet. With our close proximity to and frequency of communication with North America and inter-locked as we are with their education system, black theology might infiltrate our region and offer a strong challenge. Are we prepared for this challenge?

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The Gospel and Chinese Society

Samuel Ling

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Evangelical interest in evangelizing the Chinese people has increased as China begins to open her doors to the West. Among the Chinese of the diaspora, the church is maturing and a new generation of theologically conscious leaders is emerging. In such a context, theological reflection on the Christian message for the Chinese people is something which is both timely and desirable. The increase in training programmes designed for cross-cultural as well as national workers among the Chinese, in North American theological schools, will encourage this trend.

I CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Theology involves an interface between the text and the context, the infallible Scripture and the cultural situation. In the case of the Chinese context, a multi-disciplinary approach is needed. Insights need to be integrated from biblical, theological and historical studies, as well as from studies in Chinese literature and art forms, the social and behavioural sciences and the history of the Chinese church. What makes the task more complex is that the Chinese cultural context is itself changing: what does it mean, after all, to say that one is 'Chinese' today? What is the common denominator between a foreign exchange student from the People's Republic of China studying in North America, a scientist from Taiwan teaching in a North American university, a restaurant worker from Hong Kong and his wife working in a garment factory in Chinatown, a fourth-generation American-born

Chinese professional, a doctor from Taiwan working in South America and his children and ethnic Chinese, completely immersed in the cultures of the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia? It is futile to seek living examples of pure, traditional Chinese culture; to speak of the Maoist 'Socialist Man' as contemporary Chinese culture is equally simplistic. The heirs of the Middle Kingdom constitute a worldwide 'salad-bowl' of ethnic Chinese; whether they share similar values, beliefs, and worldviews is not altogether clear.

To reflect on theology and the Chinese cultural context, one needs to keep in mind the Confucian-Taoist worldview which sees China as the Middle Kingdom, man as the correlate of nature, and *jen*, or 'humane-ness', as the ideal in life.¹ Into this consensus entered p. 148 Buddhism which, through its art forms, penetrated Chinese culture and assimilated itself so successfully that historians and missiologists are still wondering why Christianity by comparison, remained such a foreign religion.² This traditional culture went through an agonizing transformation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—a process of change marked by humiliation, suffering, identity crisis and the search for a modern apparatus for statecraft.³

In this modern transformation, there are several figure types which, if studied carefully, may yield useful clues for evangelism and church growth among the Chinese. For example, the role of the gentry on the local village level is a significant reason why Chinese are, and continue to be, antagonistic toward Christianity as a foreign religion.⁴ As the central power of the imperial government fell into the hands of regional military leaders, 'warlordism' became a factor in Chinese life: disunity and conflict became the context for the search for national salvation.⁵ The origins, leadership style, and patterns of conflict of the warlords are all worth careful investigation. Then there is the Taoist and Buddhist monk, on the fringe of society, embodying man's retreat from culture to nature, and performing rituals essential to the bonding of the clan community.⁶ To what extent are missionaries and Chinese pastors still regarded as 'western monks'? And what about the secret societies, religious in their ideology but always posing a socio-political threat to the imperial court—the Taipings as an example?⁷ Is the idea of the Christian Church—a voluntary society of individuals and families bound together by a common commitment to a theology and a lifestyle—so foreign to the mainstream of Chinese thought and culture, that one looks to the 'fringe' for analogies?

As China turned to the West, she reluctantly assigned specific individuals the task of dealing with foreign merchants. These agents— p. 149 *compradores*—were strictly regulated by the government officials; their usefulness was highly qualified by the

¹ Derk Bodde, 'Harmony and Conflict in Chinese Philosophy', *Studies in Chinese Thought*, Arthur Wright (ed.), (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1953).

² Arthur Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History* (N.Y.: Atheneum, 1969).

³ Joseph R. Lovenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

⁴ Chung-li Chang, *The Chinese Gentry: Studies on Their Role in Nineteenth-Century Chinese Society* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1955); Paul A. Cohen, *China and Christianity: The Missionary Movement and the Growth of Chinese Antiforeignism, 1860–1870* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963).

⁵ Stanley, Spector, *Li Hung-chang and the Huai Army* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964); Jerome Ch'en, *Yuan Shih-k'ai 1895–1916* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961); James E. Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord: The Gamer of Eeng Yuhsiang* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966).

⁶ C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1961).

⁷ Vincent Shih, *The Taiping Ideology: Its Source, Interpretations and Influence* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967).

foreigners' interests. They embodied a generation of westernized Chinese, whose children were to grow up and learn western languages and business practices—often from the missionary!⁸ What lessons has the Chinese Church learned from the *compradores* as she grows, matures and takes her place in the worldwide community of believers? How do we work together with the missionary community in dignity and joy, without undue dependence? Will the tradition of 'rice Christians' live on into the twenty-first century?

The search for modern science and technology as the answer to China's social problems is most evidently embodied in the foreign student. In the early years of this century, the student went to France, Japan and the United States, and returned in the 1910s to introduce western thought—wholesale, hardly thought through or sorted out—to his compatriots. In the case of the Christian colleges in China, representing the 'socializing wing' of the western missionaries, who saw liberal arts education as the bridge between China and the West, their mission and role was no longer unique by the 1910s.⁹ The returned foreign student is a type in Chinese society and the Chinese church, in the May Fourth era (1916–1927) as well as today.¹⁰

Evangelizing and discipling the contemporary Chinese community in diaspora is a complex and tedious process. Chinese today are highly pragmatic in their approach to life—in this they have learned from both their ancestors (pragmatism as the counterpart to Confucian-Taoist mysticism) and from the West. The processes of urbanization, westernization and immigration have all affected the face of the Chinese community. It seems that the most fruitful way to 'do theology' in such a context is to 'do ministry'. Could one speak of 'indigenous ministry as theology?' The struggles and the maturing of the Chinese Church in diaspora deserve careful study.¹¹ A few clues from the Chinese society as well as from the life of the Chinese Church p. 150 follow, to suggest paths of inquiry toward the formation of the contours of contextual theology.

II DOCTRINE OF MAN

To evangelize the Chinese people, the missionary needs to teach what Scripture teaches about *man*, as well as what it teaches about God. Traditional Chinese thought and culture is tremendously interested in the life of man: how he relates to nature; how he functions in society with a specifically assigned station and role; how he maintains equilibrium in the midst of social and political change.¹² Contemporary Chinese experience is no less interested in man: How does one face the tremendous suffering brought about by two centuries of war and revolution? What does the Bible say about man's predicament? A theology built around the experience of man as unifying theme, which is both theocentric and compassionate, is something worth the effort.

⁸ Albert Feuerwerker, *China's Early Industrialization: Sheng Hsuan-huai (1844–1916) and Mandarin Enterprise* (New York: Atheneum, 1970).

⁹ Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967); Jessie G. Lutz, *China and the Christian Colleges, 1850–1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970); Philip West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western Relations, 1916–1952* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

¹⁰ For example, the Breakthrough Movement in Hong Kong, began in 1973; and *Na Han* magazine, launched in 1983.

¹¹ Gail Law (ed.), *Chinese Churches Handbook* (Hong Kong: Chinese Coordination Center of World Evangelism, 1982).

¹² Derk Bodde, *China's Cultural Tradition: What and Whither?* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957).

The God who revealed himself in Scripture is a God who came into covenant with man. Covenant is the form of divine intervention into time and space and the bond with which the infinite Creator bound himself. Our God is faithful to his promises. The very act of creation is a covenant act: the creator charges man with the task of covenant obedience. After the Fall, God's providence continues to uphold civilization. Into the world of suffering and evil God came in human flesh, to establish the new covenant with his blood. Covenant theology could yield much fruit when applied to the Chinese concern with man's predicament.

And what about the family and the community? Does not the Bible present God's covenant with his people in the context of family instruction and communal worship? The role of the husband and father as covenant keeper and teacher of the law speaks to the Chinese quest for the harmonious clan. Much anthropological and historical inquiry would draw out the implications of the biblical doctrine of family and community for the Chinese situation. There *is* an alternative to preaching an individual-oriented gospel.

III CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

'What is truth?' Pilate asked Jesus. In the traditional Chinese understanding, truth is acquired—arrived at—through a dual process **P. 151** of mystical communion with nature (the ideal *chun-tzu*, gentleman) and exemplary ethical behaviour in the context of the community (the sage-prince). Chinese epistemology is both mystical and pragmatic. Neither of which is particularly similar to the western cognitive-oriented approach. It is fascinating to note that when Chinese Protestants wrote their theologies in the 1920s and 1930s, in both 'liberal' and 'conservative' quarters a mystical approach emerged. To contextualize theology in the Chinese situation is to use the 'right-brain approach'. T. C. Chao, professor of religion at Yenching University and China's foremost theologian, wrote poems, prayers, liturgies, lyrics and fiction. His vision for the Chinese church is deeply immersed in the poetic, literary, mystical realm. Chao was a thoroughgoing Confucian; he was trained in the classics. He was also trained in the western liberal tradition at Vanderbilt University. Chao struggled with two identities—Confucian Chinese and liberal Christian. In the end he lived through the tension between these two value Systems; he celebrated the tension in the poetic realm; he transcended it by taking a non-cognitive approach. In his prayers and lyrics we hear both the Christian message and the Confucian vision; tension is transcended with the very medium of expression. Looking to the fundamentalists, we find Watchman Nee speaking of the 'release of the Spirit in man', borrowing heavily from T. Austin-Sparks and the Plymouth Brethren movement. Nee's influence both among Chinese and western Christians lies in his search for an experience-based piety which would meet the needs of the human heart. There is much anti-intellectualism in contemporary Chinese evangelical circles, and some of the influence comes from Nee's theology.

Young Chinese church leaders today are trained in the classical western approach: highly cognitive, analytic, systematic. Perhaps a literary, poetic, and mystical dimension needs to be integrated into this form of theological training. As the church expresses her understanding in both intellectual and aesthetic terms, she will speak of the transcendent God who is the living and true God; she will wrestle with inscripturation as the very process of covenant making; she will wrestle with obedience to the law and freedom in the Spirit; she will learn to encounter God himself through worship. In coming to Christ, one has found the way, the truth and the life.

IV THE CHINESE CHURCH

In the contemporary Chinese Church, encouraging signs point to a maturing community. Easy believism gives way to more thought-out **P. 152** methods of disciple-making and church growth; the deep spiritual emphasis is not dying out; in the deeper recesses of the Chinese Christian consciousness there is the search for power in the charismatic dimension. Leadership patterns are both puzzling and encouraging: the laity is awakened to serve the church; women's role is not only unclear, but it lacks encouragement from the Christian community; and increasingly the Chinese churches are exploring structures for co-operation and unity, bypassing the traditional ecclesiastical (denominational) structure for models which resemble 'networking'. How does one speak the gospel into such a context?

Can one speak of sanctification as the very context of justification? Chinese are intensely interested in how to live the Christian life—what is the 'pay-off' in this life if one becomes a Christian? Perhaps in delineating justification and sanctification too distinctly, we lose the unity of what the Spirit does in the process of applying Christ's benefits. Here insights from spiritual formation will prove helpful. What about leadership? What is leadership? Traditionally Chinese have lived with both a formal pattern of leadership (the imperial government) and an informal, but recognized pattern (the local gentry). While all pay homage to the emperor, the 'eyes of the people are bright as snow'. Power abuse and injustice are concerns which are often unspoken, but nonetheless real. The servant of Jesus Christ needs to pray for the power of the powerless—empowered by the Spirit of God, the servant empowers the people of God unto ministry. Dare the church turn over the tools of servanthood to the laity? Will a leadership pattern emerge which borrows from the best of both the 'formal' and the 'informal' approaches?

The Chinese community is a variety of ethnic Chinese. Chinese culture itself is changing. How does the Church—wonderfully gifted by the Spirit with talents and abilities, but frightfully small in comparison with overall Chinese population—speak the gospel into this context? By re-discovering the vision of the transcendent, covenant-maker God; by ministering with the deepest compassion for man trapped in his predicament of sin and suffering; by empowering the people of God with both the *dunamis* and the tools for ministry. Then will the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. Hard work, yes, but wonderful yields await us.

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Dialogue on China

Jonathan Chao and Ralph Covell

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A Discussion on the Church in China with Jonathan Chao and Ralph Covell.

QUESTION ONE:

What is the estimated Protestant Christian population of China? What are some of the reasons for this growth?

Chao: Our estimate in the past two years has been a minimum of 35 million and most likely 50 million Christians, or people attending meetings in China. This figure is mainly related to us by itinerant preachers travelling in different parts of China. In a certain province, it is estimated that there are, for example, a minimum of ten million believers out of a population of 75 million.

Another estimate came from an itinerant house church leader whose vocation has given him opportunity to travel among these provinces. He estimates a minimum of 35 million. This kind of estimate has prevailed inside China for at least two years, so our estimate is based on their estimates. As for the three most important reasons for the phenomenal Church growth, the first is the persecution and suffering on the part of believers that has produced a renewal and deeper appreciation of the Christian faith which drives the believer to share his precious faith ... with his fellow Christians. A second reason would be that during and after the cultural revolution the Chinese people, particularly the young, experienced a sense of cultural and spiritual vacuum. They seemed to have no clear theology or faith that would give meaning to their lives. When they were exposed to the Christian Gospel through believers, they received the Gospel as something to give comfort, direction, and meaning to life.

The third reason would be the diligent travelling of itinerant preachers who saw their own responsibilities as (1) preaching the gospel to those who have not heard it; (2) encouraging believers and helping them to organize churches; (3) conducting systematic teaching among the resident house church leaders; (4) the prevalence of miracles that the Lord worked among His people in healing, exorcism, and the demonstration of power against demonic or political opposition; (5) outside assistance of radio broadcasting, literature, Bible delivery and fellowship. p. 154

Covell: It is difficult to give an accurate estimate of the number of Christians in China. One segment of the church gains from overestimating and another may gain by underestimating. Apart from these promotional and political problems, there is the question of 'Who is a Christian?'

Of the large group that are always 'hanging on' to a fast-moving 'people movement', how many of whom we hear are professing Christians but do not wish to be identified as such? Given all of these factors, I like a mediating figure of about 15–20 million.

Why growth? To be meaningful these reasons must be unique for China. Many other nice reasons can be given, such as prayer, witness, etc., but these are happening in many places outside of China with *no* growth.

(1) Christianity in China, probably for the first time in its history, is not commonly viewed as foreign by the Chinese people as a whole. To my mind, this is the overriding factor in growth. This has come because of a government and an open Church that wishes outside influence to be curtailed or at least minimized. We have never before seen what Christ could do by His Spirit through the Chinese people on their own. 'Foreign', as I used it here, means 'foreign connection' or 'foreign control' and not so much foreign style, method, theological content, etc.

(2) Suffering in the commitment of Christians to Christ. This has been true of all segments of the church, with no exception before or during the cultural revolution. People have turned to the suffering Christ.

(3) Disillusionment on the part of many younger and older people with the 'zigs and zags' of the government in its implementation of a Marxist policy. They have turned to Christ who offers hope.

(4) Before and during the Cultural Revolution a spiritual vacuum had existed. Now that 'religion' is tolerated there has been a religious resurgence (not just Christian), and every religious group has grown.

(5) The existence of a TSPM has provided an umbrella in its semiofficial relationship with the government, enabling a multitude of house meetings to spring up taking the Christian faith beyond the extension-house meetings related to the TSPM. Without a Church group prepared to be a buffer with the government, to help work out a policy of religious freedom, and to insist on a 'foreign-free' Church, the Church could well have been persecuted out of existence.

(6) The existing churches (and Christians) have contextualized their faith in meeting pressing needs—healing, freedom from demonic [p. 155](#) oppression, forgiveness of sins, hope, community, and (for the more informed) an understanding of how God works in history.

(7) A unified Church in that this is a 'post-denominational' period.

QUESTION TWO:

What are the primary concerns of the Chinese Christians?

Chao: The primary concerns of the Chinese Christians are as follows:

(1) They hope for an improvement in China's religious policy whereby their faith in God and expression of that faith through worship, Christian sacraments, and evangelism can be conducted without persecution.

(2) They hope that those ministers who work within the Three Self Patriotic Movement would be more loyal to Christ and not betray the believers in the name of Christian ministry while actually obeying the commands of the state.

(3) Christians outside China understand their predicament and do not take the words of the Three Self Patriotic Movement at their face value.

(4) Christians from outside continue to pray for them, to supply Christian literature and Bibles, broadcast training and evangelistic programmes to China.

(5) They will be used of God to bring about a nationwide evangelization of the Chinese people.

Covell: The more intellectual believers, as well as many in urban centres, are concerned that Christianity not be 'foreign', that they learn how to better relate in a Christian fashion to the state, and that they identify with the common Chinese people, from whom they often have been estranged in the past, in their concerns. They wish to see China modernized and developed. They wish to see religious liberty implemented evenly over the country. They wish a stable government. Believers in other traditions or in rural areas who espouse a stance of 'Christ against culture', are less optimistic that any on-going satisfactory rapport can be worked out between a Marxist government and the church. They are worried about their children being indoctrinated in school, about inability to evangelize outside the Church, about being discriminated against wherever leftist cadres ignore the constitution, whether what they view as 'legitimate' will be viewed by others as 'counterrevolutionary', etc. My answer is simplistic—Chinese Christians are spread over a continuum and their primary concerns are as varied as those of Christians in even one local American church. [p. 156](#)

QUESTION THREE:

What are the major contributions of the Chinese Church to the worldwide Christian community?

Chao: There are many. I think the first contribution is the realization demonstrated through experience that the Gospel thrives under all political and social circumstances; that the Gospel does not necessarily need a free society to spread; in fact, it spreads even faster and better under conditions of difficulty. The Chinese Church has learned that it is possible to live out the New Testament teachings of Christian community life as the body of Christ without church buildings. The Church is essentially spiritual in nature and so is her ministry. Organization, structure and buildings are only contingent matters which can facilitate church life and church growth, but they can also be hindrances to authentic Christian living.

Secondly, Chinese Christians have learned that suffering is a training ground for Christian maturity, a necessary and integral part of our Christian path of life; that is, suffering is concomitant with discipleship, with following Jesus. So, believers should not fear suffering but accept suffering as training for growth in faith and a deepening understanding of the believer's relationship with Christ, particularly in understanding the profound truths of our union with suffering, death, and the resurrection of Jesus. The profound teaching of Paul about the Christian life cannot be understood without some measure of actual suffering and experience.

Thirdly, suffering has taught the Church of China to learn obedience through suffering as Jesus did. Fourthly, the work of the Holy Spirit is profound and diversified. Wherever and whenever the Christian Church is faced with resistance to the Gospel, the Holy Spirit comes to demonstrate His power in working out miracles and signs so that an unbelieving community will have to accept the reality of God's existence and the power of the Holy Spirit. Christians in China have also experienced how the Spirit of God validates and vindicates their authentic faith and the reality of their ministry.

Covell: I think that the Church in China, while hardly perfect, has a definite contribution to make to the worldwide Christian community:

(1) Helps us to see that vitality is not related to strength, availability of materials and all those other 'things' on which we depend, but on finding God's strength in the midst of weakness.

(2) Power of prayer.

(3) A sacrificial spirit in serving Christ. [p. 157](#)

(4) A spirit of perseverance no matter what the odds.

(5) A new implementation of *unity* that has profound missiological implications. In most areas, for example, they have different forms of the Lord's table on different Sundays of the month, different approaches to baptism. If they can do this because of their environment and really see it work, what does this say for God's work in general around the world? Everywhere I went they said 'We know little about the future, but it must never again include the old mission society and denominational divisions'.

(6) Depending on God's strength 'to bind the strong man' and thus to be vehicles of God's Spirit to accomplish 'signs and wonders'.

(7) Obedience to Christ. They know very little, but what they do they seem to obey.

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Dr. Ralph Covell, a former missionary to China and Taiwan, is Academic Dean of the Conservative Baptist Seminary in Denver, Colorado, U.S.A. and Editor of *Missiology*. p. 158

Statement on Peace

Churches in the German Democratic Republic

Reprinted from EKD Bulletin No. 2, June 1985 with permission.

This Statement of Peace was made by the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the German Democratic Republic and the Evangelical Church in Germany on the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War.

(Editor)

(1) On 8th May 1945 the Second World War came to an end in Europe. The full extent of the destruction it had caused became apparent to many people only at this stage. Over 40 million people were dead, and towns and villages had been laid waste throughout the countries directly affected by hostilities, in particular the Soviet Union, Poland, France and Germany. The horrifying reports of what had been perpetrated in the name of the German people in concentration camps and occupied countries now made inescapably clear to everyone the criminal nature of the German regime which had started this war and continued it without compassion to its bitter end. The world was appalled when it learned of the Jewish holocaust.

(2) Under the influence of the Word of God, many Christians saw what happened after this as divine judgement. Germany was divided into zones of occupation. Large numbers of soldiers had to go into captivity. Many refugees were not able to return to their homes, while many others still had to leave theirs at this stage. Those who survived had years of hunger ahead of them. Some had to suffer bitter humiliation. There were different reactions to what was happening among those affected; some experienced it as the collapse of their world, others as liberation. For most people it was both at once.

(3) People at that time were troubled by many questions: How can we cope with the guilt of our past? What can we do to help heal the wounds of the war? How can we help to build bridges of reconciliation between the peoples of Europe after all the atrocities committed and the hatred arising out of them? Where can we find guidance?

(4) Consternation at their profound guilt, combined with contemplation of the promises of God, gave rise to thanksgiving for their own survival in the hell of destruction and the assurance that life had been given anew as a gift of God.

(5) A few months after the end of the war, representatives of the Evangelical Church in Germany met with representatives of the ecumenical movement in Stuttgart and declared:

'We are all the more grateful for this visit as we know ourselves to be with p. 159 our people in a great company of suffering, but also in a great solidarity of guilt. With great pain do we say: through us has endless suffering been brought to many people and countries.'

(6) Today, 40 years after the end of the war, we are deeply grateful for what God has done. He has made new fellowship grow between Christians and Christian churches as a

result of our confession of guilt. We have been amazed to see signs of reconciliation appearing. A new relationship with the neighbouring peoples has developed because of their readiness to be reconciled with us. The generations born since the war are able to encounter each other without reservations. We have been living in peace for 40 years. We have been able to rebuild our towns and villages and create new means of existence. In retrospect we see the end of the war as an event which liberated us to give testimony to God's grace and minister to God's world in a new way.

(7) However, we cannot close our eyes to the fact that there has been a continuing threat to peace throughout the past 40 years. Tortured humanity has not experienced the healing which the writers of the Stuttgart Declaration hoped for. Even those generations which did not participate directly in the Second World War have had to bear its consequences. Distrust and fear are still present under the surface in the neighbouring countries. The war-time Allies have separated, and two powerful military alliances with different social and economic systems now face each other, heavily armed. There are two different states on German soil, whose border has also become the border between East and West. Both are firmly anchored in their own military alliance and economic system, and both bear part of the responsibility for solving the major problems of the world: the maintenance of peace for all peoples, the struggle for justice, and the elimination of hunger.

(8) We in the Protestant churches have also made false judgements over the past four decades. It has been difficult for us to know the right steps to take. It was difficult for us to accept the reality of two German states; but we came to realize that the first priority must be to maintain peace. It was difficult for us to give up the organisational unity of the German Protestant churches; but this was the only way for us to be able to serve and witness independently in different social systems. It took us a long time to overcome prejudices and hostile attitudes towards the victors of 1945 and to help build new bridges of trust. It took us a long time to recognize the special challenge and opportunity offered to us in the joint witness of our churches for peace. It has taken along time for the members of our congregations to realize that limits must be set on our pursuit of prosperity because of the needs of the starving and oppressed and because of our responsibility for the [p. 160](#) Creation. As far as some developments over the past 40 years are concerned, we will have to say like our predecessors who wrote the Stuttgart Declaration: 'We accuse ourselves for not witnessing more courageously, for not praying more faithfully, for not believing more joyously and for not loving more ardently.'

(9) We are all the more thankful for the freedom God has given us to serve him. We have experienced that sin can be forgiven, setting us free to make a fresh start. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross and his resurrection, which we celebrate at Easter, are signs of hope to all those afflicted by guilt, distress and helplessness. This gives us the encouragement and obligation to carry out our responsibilities in today's world.

(10) As churches in the two German states we both declare that a war must never start from German soil again. We both call for a stop to be put to the arms race. We are both convinced that lasting peace cannot be achieved by the system of nuclear deterrence, and that it must be replaced at all costs. We both advocate a European peace order. We both remind the industrialized countries of their responsibility for creating a life worth living for the peoples of the Third World.

(11) We have the following joint requests in commemoration of the end of the war 40 years ago.

We call upon the members of our churches:

Let us not cease to pray for world peace. Prayer is the distinctive contribution which we Christians and churches have to make towards peace in the world. Let us not grow

weary of listening to the Holy Scriptures, which declare the Cross of Golgotha to be God's way of making peace with his world. Let us be ambassadors of God's peace in our everyday lives.

(12) We call upon all people in both German states:

Let your lives testify to the fact that conflicts with other people can be settled peacefully. Help to educate our young people for peace and not hatred. Resist the development of stereotyped images of the 'enemy'. We ask those people who have had to suffer particularly because of the war, its after-effects and the political antagonisms of the intervening period not to become bitter and not to demand a return to the situation as it was before the war, which is not possible. We ask the Germans to see their present-day burdens mainly as a result of the Second World War and to reflect on their being a consequence of our guilt.

(13) We call upon the governments of both German states:

Exercise your special responsibility for safeguarding peace untiringly. Thank you for all your realistic and circumspect policies affecting [p. 161](#) relations between the two German states. By being both conscientious and trusting, make it possible for further steps to be taken towards putting the aims of the Basic Treaty¹ into practice. When you speak about the political aims of the two German states, do not raise hopes which cannot be fulfilled, or promote distrust. Continue to do all in your power to reduce the existing burdens on your people.

(14) We call upon the Allies of the Second World War:

Renew your efforts to achieve mutual understanding as you work together towards the joint aim of peace and justice. Strive to take further steps which will make it possible to abandon all nuclear weapons. Stop producing new weapons systems. Introduce new initiatives into the negotiations on conventional arms limitation and confidence-building measures. Promote cultural, economic and scientific co-operation, and contacts between people living on different sides of the borders. Be guided by the insight that security for one can only be found today in security for all.

(15) The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead gives us the assurance that it is God's will that life in fellowship and peace should gain the victory over all sin and hostility. This encourages us, as we commemorate the 40th anniversary of the end of the war, to trust God anew and to renew our responsibility for today's world and our hope in God's eternal Kingdom of Peace.

'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God!'

[\(2 Corinthians 5:19, 20\).](#)

The following are some excerpts from the sermon of Bishop D. Eduard Lohse, Chairman of the EKD Council, at the ecumenical service held in Cologne Cathedral on 8th May 1985

... The older ones among us will remember the 8th May 1945 as they experienced it themselves. Some saw it as the collapse of their world, others as a day of liberation. For many people it was both at once. Thankfulness that they were still alive was combined with consternation [p. 162](#) at the immeasurable suffering caused by the war. Over 40 million people were dead, and towns and villages had been laid waste throughout the countries directly affected by hostilities, in particular the Soviet Union, Poland, France and

¹ Treaty between the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany, ratified in 1973, regulating relations between the two states, e.g. diplomatic representation visiting arrangements.

Germany. The horrifying reports of what had been perpetrated in the name of the German people in concentration camps and occupied countries now made inescapably clear to everyone the criminal nature of the German regime which had started this war and continued it without compassion to the bitter end. The world was appalled when it learned of the Jewish holocaust. How could all this have happened?...

A few months after the end of the war representatives of the Evangelical Church in Germany met with representatives of the ecumenical movement in Stuttgart and declared:

'We accuse ourselves for not witnessing more courageously, for not praying more faithfully, for not believing more joyously and for not loving more ardently. Now a new beginning is to be made in our Churches.'

We were in fact able to make a fresh start, by God's grace. We have now been living in peace for 40 years. We have been able to rebuild our towns and villages and create new means of existence. We have been amazed to see signs of reconciliation appearing. Our relations with the neighbouring countries are marked by increasing confidence. 'Reconciliation over the graves' has become a reality and must not be called into question again. In the face of death every quarrel ceases and every conflict is void of meaning and justification. We remember with respect all those who died or were murdered during the war, both from other nations and from our own. May they rest in God's peace.

We often feel the barriers which still divide people from one another. There is still an urgent need for further steps of reconciliation, especially with the Eastern countries. I would like to give an example. When I visited the Christian churches in the Soviet Union with a delegation from our church in 1982, we were in Leningrad on 22nd June and looked back on that day in 1941, when Hitler attacked Russia and triggered off a horrendous war. We stood by the graves of 700,000 people who died during the siege of that city, which lasted over three years. And yet, in the evening, we took part in a service at St. Nicholas' Cathedral at which the bishop greeted us as Christian brothers and sisters and welcomed us into the fellowship of the congregation there. These are visible signs of reconciliation.

We have had peace for 40 years now. But we are all aware of the fact that peace is not secure. Years of a fresh start have been granted to us. But we know that the wounds of war are not yet healed. Our [p. 163](#) country is rent asunder by a border. For many of us it blocks the way that should lead to reconciliation with our neighbours in the East. It may even arouse a feeling of defiance, so that people only talk about the guilt of others and forget their own. Such ideas serve to erect walls of separation instead of breaking them down, and close our hardened hearts to others. But God's Word has given us a wonderful opportunity when it invites us, for Christ's sake, to 'be reconciled to God'. A new beginning is possible through his forgiveness ... [p. 164](#)

How Long O Lord? A sermon on the Gospel and Liberation

Ray Hundley

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Habakkuk.... This great prophet of the Old Testament lived in days similar to those that we are going through in Colombia and in all of Latin America right now. Days of difficulty, strife, and confusion. Somehow in the midst of all that, he received God's message for his day. I believe much of what he says is God's message for our day as well.

In chapter [1](#), verses [1-4](#), Habakkuk begins ... "The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw. How long, O Lord, will I call for help, And Thou wilt not hear? I cry out to Thee, "Violence!" Yet Thou dost not save. Why dost Thou make me see iniquity, And cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; Strife exists and contention arises. Therefore, the law is ignored, And justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore, justice comes out perverted" (NASB).

These were difficult days in Judah. Habakkuk's lament seems so familiar to me. I can almost hear those same words being said with a Latin American accent ... 'How long, Lord, will we cry unto You and You will not hear us? How long will we have to see violence and strife and injustice and oppression? How long, O Lord, will we have to look on those things; the perversion of the law? the victory of those who oppress us and hurt us and ignore your teaching? How long, O Lord?'

That's the cry today in Latin America and perhaps throughout the third world. How long do we have to look on those things? I must be frank and tell you that Latin America and the suffering situation through which that continent is going is deep in my heart. It's difficult for me to go to Latin America and see children growing up in miserable conditions, with poverty and hunger and disease and lack of education; lacking health facilities, with suffering and squalor and misery all around them.

And I know that hurts the heart of our God as well. You'll notice as you read Habakkuk that God never reprimands him for this question because Habakkuk was actually saying, 'Lord, how can YOU stand to look on these things? You're a righteous God and all this unrighteousness is going on around us. How long?' God never says, 'Habakkuk, that's not a proper question to ask me. You must be quiet!' But rather, [p. 165](#) God answers Habakkuk and He says, 'I have a plan and I know what I'm going to do, and it's not going to be much longer.'

The Latin American world and the third world in general are facing tremendous crises. We are going to go in one way or the other in the next ten years in Latin America. If something isn't done to stop problems of oppression and injustice, misery and suffering, I have no doubt that within ten to fifteen years the whole continent will be a socialist, Marxist state. I believe revolution is coming in Latin America, and that revolution is going to turn upside down everything that's going on there today.

It seems to me that in God's Word are some clear principles about what we as Christians ought to do in the light of this kind of suffering. And I confess to you that I am a guilty missionary. At the beginning of my missionary career in Colombia I lived among poor people, and saw what was going on around me, but it never got through to me. It's possible to isolate yourself from these things, even living with the people. It's possible to live in your own little world and never think about people around you who are dying of starvation, who are going through life unable to learn because of lack of nutrition. It's easy to forget down there that the Colombian minimum daily wage is \$2.50, and that food and clothing in Colombia costs just about what it costs here. Add onto that the many Colombian families who have 10, 11, 12, 14, 15 children. Want to see what it's like to live in the rest of the world? Take \$2.50 and go to the market and buy everything your family is going to eat for that day.

I have had to come before the Lord in recent years and say I'm sorry. And the thing that has affected me is a theology in Latin America called Liberation Theology. I began reading it several years ago in Colombia and I rejected it immediately, mainly because I felt it was Marxist and I felt that anything that came from Marxism probably couldn't be very good. The last three years of my life I've spent eight hours a day, five days a week, reading Liberation Theology. And in the course of those three years God has done some remarkable things in my own life. One of the things He has done is to sensitize me to His view of the poor. God cares about them. He's concerned about their poverty and suffering and He's willing to do something about it.

All of this is to say that I believe we need to think seriously about the questions being asked by liberation theologians. Liberation Theology in its most radical form combines Marxism and Christianity. The movement began in the 1960s (in that decade of ferment, uproar, and student riots here in the States and around the world) with a group of Latin American Protestant theologians. They began to meet and asked [p. 166](#) one question: 'How can we apply the Word of God to the social problems of our continent? That is, what does God's Word have to say about the suffering of Latin America?'

As they met, they began to realize that in Latin America, development had never worked. Reform had never brought great progress. And so as they examined the problem, recognizing that development and reform weren't working in their setting, they reached one conclusion, that the only way to stop this problem, the only way to change the situation in Latin America, was through complete upheaval, turning upside down everything in their society. And the only way to do that was through a violent Marxist revolution. They committed themselves to Marxism and to the revolution, and they decided that as far as they were concerned, God's Word supported them in that commitment.

They began to read scripture in a revolutionary way. As they did, certain texts jumped out to them. One was the Exodus event when the Israelites, oppressed by the Egyptians in slavery and bondage, afforded their cruel taskmasters great financial gain from their labour and slavery. Latin American theologians saw that in a new light, saying 'That's where we are today. We are slaves. We are oppressed. We face the same kind of bondage the Israelites were under in Egypt.' And if they had to identify who Egypt was they always came up with one country, the United States of America.

During that process Latin theologians saw that God liberated the Israelites from Egypt. He had brought them out. Many liberation theologians believe that God had nothing to do with that, but actually the Israelites themselves fostered an insurrection, a revolution, a rebellion against the Egyptians. They had fought against them and won, escaped. And that later when the texts of scripture were written down, 'God language' was used to make it sound more important, as if God had done it, but the Israelites really did it themselves. And so they took that as the great model, the great example, of what needs to be done today to solve the problems of oppression and injustice. They didn't have to go very far before they found some passages in the New Testament; two of which are very significant, in the Gospel of Luke.

First is the Magnificat, the words of Mary, the mother of Jesus, when she says that 'God has filled the hungry and sent the rich away empty handed.' Many liberation theologians refer to Mary as the first guerrilla fighter ... in theory.

Then they go to [Luke 4](#). Jesus comes on the scene, with His first address, the first message He ever gives. Look at [Luke 4](#), verses [18](#) and [19](#). Jesus preaches His first sermon in Nazareth and He presents the [p. 167](#) outline of what His ministry is to be with these words, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind. To set free those who

are downtrodden [or oppressed]. To proclaim the favourable year of the Lord. And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and He sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him and He began to say to them, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." '

No doubt exists that the kind of emotional drive the liberation theologians have been able to generate with these passages is similar to the expectation that was there in the first century when Jesus came. Jews writhed under the heel of the Roman Empire, oppressed, exploited, and afflicted. They wanted liberation. They wanted God to raise up another judge who would destroy the Romans and restore their kingdom. And as Jesus came and surely as He read these words in the synagogue in Nazareth, many of the Jews in their own hearts concluded, 'He's here. This is God's Messiah. He's come to liberate us.'

But somehow the rest of Jesus' ministry doesn't quite fulfil that expectation, does it? And that's where the problem comes. Up to that point you can say that in the Old Testament God did all these things and God raised up men to save His people from oppression and affliction by destroying the enemies of God.

All of those things lead up to this final point when Jesus Christ comes on the scene. He announces His plan and says, 'I'm the one about whom these scriptures speak. I have come to proclaim good news to the poor.' And surely everyone sitting there thought to himself, 'This is it. He's going to liberate us from these exploiters.'

But God didn't; and Jesus didn't. And the only time Jesus uses these words in His ministry, the only time Jesus says that He's going to set men free is when he says, for example, in John chapter [8](#): 'If you abide in my words you will be my disciples. And you'll know the truth, and the truth will set you free.' And the Jews answered him and said, 'What do you mean, free? We are slaves to no man.' And Jesus answered them 'I tell you truly, any man who commits sin is a slave to sin.' When Jesus Christ began to apply the teaching of [Luke 4:18](#) and [19](#) in His ministry, He didn't gather a group of men and say 'All right, gather your weapons, sharpen your swords, and get ready. We're going to destroy the Romans.' He didn't start an insurrection. Out by a quiet lake he called four fishermen and said to them, 'Follow me and I'll make you to become fishers of men.'

No one has ever seen the problem of man the way Jesus sees it. No one has ever felt the hurt of children suffering, at seeing men and [p. 168](#) women jailed unjustly, at injustice and the cruelty and the tyranny and the oppression that characterized the Roman Empire in those days. No one has ever felt that with the depth that Jesus Christ felt. It broke his heart.

But when Jesus looked out on a world oppressed, He never counselled revolution. He brought 12 men around Himself and He said to them, 'I'm going to make you fishers of men and you're going to receive power and when you do, you'll be my witnesses.'

Now no one has a better plan for changing this world than Jesus Christ. No one is more sensitive to the needs of the poor than Jesus was. No one understands the needs of suffering humanity more deeply than Jesus did. The plan Jesus left is still the greatest plan for turning this world upside down.

In Acts chapter [1](#), verses [1-8](#), Jesus begins to summarize His teaching to His disciples. They've seen His resurrection power and seeing that power, they come to one conclusion, 'wow! If He has that much power there's nothing He can't do ... He can certainly restore the kingdom to Israel.'

Listen to what they say, 'Gathering them together He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "You heard of from Me, for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." '

Their logical response to that would be, 'Oh, great Lord, finally we're going to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and go out and win the world!' But that's not their reaction at all. They know only one model of what it means when the Holy Spirit comes upon a man. You'll find it repeated 12 times in the book of Judges. The Holy Spirit came upon so-and-so and he was used of God to liberate the people of Israel from their oppressors.

So they say to Him, 'Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?' Now Lord, is this it? We've waited three years. Surely now, now is the time when you are going to use your power. We've seen it. You said the Holy Spirit is going to come upon us like the judges of old to free your people from oppression and slavery. Now Lord? Is this finally the time that you're going to destroy the Romans and give back the kingdom to Israel?

Jesus said, 'It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority, but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth.' p. 169

The plan to change the world that Jesus Christ left us is not Marxist revolution. It is Holy Spirit-anointed witness. Jesus Christ sees man's oppression of man. I heard someone say just a few weeks ago that capitalism is the oppression of man by man, and socialism is just the opposite. Both systems are the oppression of man by man. Both systems contain grave problems. Both systems emphasize finance and economics as the final criteria of life.

They are wrong. Jesus Christ Himself said, and this is a message to you from the students of Latin America, 'Life does not consist in the abundance of the things that you possess.' If there's one message that needs to be delivered to the Church in the United States, it's that verse from Jesus Christ: 'Life does not consist in the abundance of the things that you possess.' Jesus Christ's plan for freeing the world has not changed in 2000 years. It's still the most powerful solution to the problems that we face.

Now in contrast to all of that, I close by sharing a glimpse into the world of Liberation Theology. I'm well aware that in the United States there's not been much dissemination of material about Liberation Theology. Most of it still needs to be translated from Spanish and Portuguese into English so that we can understand what these men are trying to say. But in 1972 in Santiago, Chile, liberation theologians, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, met. I'd like to read to you three short passages from the document summarizing that meeting to give you an idea of the whole world out there that we know very little of in this country.

The opening paragraph of their document reads this way:

We wish to identify ourselves clearly as Christians who on the basis of the process of liberation in which our Latin American peoples live, and of our own practical and real commitment to the construction of a socialist society, think through our faith and revise our attitude of love for the oppressed.

Three important things are said in that paragraph: We as Christians want to identify ourselves clearly as those who think through their faith again in light of two things: the process of liberation in Latin America, and our own personal commitment to the construction of a socialist society.

They go on ...

As Christians, we do not wish to offer a Christian political alternative to the present revolutionary movement, but rather we wish to unite with it.

Later on they talk about this alliance between Christians and p. 170 Marxists and they say it in these terms: 'there is a growing realization of the need for a strategic alliance between Christians and Marxists in order to walk together in a common political action towards a historical project of liberation in Latin America.'

The final paragraph of the document sums up their position very clearly. These are the concluding words of the meeting:

Upon being separated from one another after this encounter to our tasks, with a renewed spirit of commitment, we make our own the well-known words of Ché Guevara. [Ché Guevara was the war commander of Fidel Castro in Cuba.] These words which these days we have in some way put into practice. 'When Christians dare to give an integral revolutionary testimony, the Latin American revolution will be invincible.'

These words challenge us because that's the reality of Latin America today. In Colombia, the world we face is one in which that is the dominant thought pattern. Chester Bitterman was killed in Colombia two years ago by Marxist guerrillas who felt that the best way to foster revolution in Colombia was by getting rid of all the missionaries, because, as they said in a newspaper article, 'these missionaries are the ones who are giving us the most trouble. They are influencing people to put their Christian faith first and their commitment to the revolution second or non-existent.'

I received a letter right after that article appeared from one of my former students who's now a guerrilla leader. He was with us in the seminary for less than a year, finally leaving in protest to join the guerrillas. He's something of a chaplain to them now. He wrote from southern Colombia to say, 'I have already included your name on a list given to the guerrilla leaders in Colombia, and if you ever come back to this country, you are going to be killed.'

Now I understand that I'm listed with the top 20 people. I trust that we can do enough good work to move ourselves up into the top 10 in that list before long.

If they think that there are missionaries in Colombia who oppose a violent Marxist revolutionary movement as the answer to the nation's problems, they are absolutely right ... and I happen to be one of them. Marxism is not the answer for Colombia nor for any country in Latin America. And I don't believe that because I'm a capitalist from the United States. I believe it because I'm a biblical Christian and I refuse to be united with an atheistic system that says that men are means to an end, and that anything goes as long as the revolution triumphs.

I'm concerned for the Latin American Church. The communists, if they succeed in the revolution in Latin America, will not be kind to the p. 171 Church. If it fails, the governments of Latin America will destroy the Church for supporting the revolution.

I'm concerned about seminary students all over Latin America who right now are being taught Liberation Theology so that they can go back to their congregations and day after day, Sunday after Sunday, preach the gospel of Marxist revolution to their people.

I went to the largest Catholic seminary in Colombia, sat down with students at a table, and asked them, 'What is your message for the people of Colombia now that you are about to graduate?' A young man said, 'Our message for Colombia is Marxist revolution!' and all those sitting around the table nodded their heads. I'm concerned.

I'm concerned about the identification card I carry which says that I'm a missionary with OMS International. And on the back it says, 'Policy in the event of kidnapping.' OMS will not pay any ransom to any group holding any of its personnel. And if they are captured for ransom, OMS will refuse to pay any ransom to have them released. I am concerned that we've come to the place in Latin America where every missionary now must carry

that card because of daily threat of being kidnapped so someone can make money, or frighten other missionaries into leaving the country. I'm concerned.

I'm concerned about my family. My wife has been stoned twice by communist students in Medellin. My children go to a school where already someone jumped over a fence, grabbed a child and tried to run off with him. He was tackled by a Colombian Christian and stopped. I'm concerned about that.

I'm concerned about the Wycliffe Bible Translators who live in constant fear. They receive phone calls almost daily from people who say, 'I know where your daughter goes to school. I know what street she walks down to catch the bus. Before she catches the bus this afternoon, I'm going to kill her.' I'm concerned that we've lost one half of the Wycliffe Bible Translators in Colombia in the last two years. I don't blame missionaries who leave. I understand.

But with God's help, we commit our lives to the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in Colombia and it could mean life or death. When Paul said, 'For me to live is Christ and to die is gain'; he meant it. So do I. And, frankly, any Christian today who doesn't mean it isn't much of a Christian.

A beautiful lady came up to me in Cambridge after I'd preached and said 'I don't believe you should go back there.'

'Why not?' I asked.

'Because it's dangerous. You might get hurt, and I'm concerned about you and your wife and your children.' [p. 172](#)

'I appreciate that,' I replied. 'I really thank you for your concern ... and I feel that concern myself. But there comes a time when you must decide what's worth living for and what's worth dying for. And frankly my family, including my children, have made that decision.'

I believe that Latin America stands at the brink of the greatest revival that continent has ever seen. When things reach their worst and people grow desperate, God's Holy Spirit can move in a way He can't in gentler times. He can sweep through a continent and ignite life after life after life with His transforming power, bringing revival to Latin America, a revival that they've never yet experienced.

Latin America's greatest need is young men and women trained to lead their own country. I don't know how many years we have left in Colombia. The American Embassy in Medellin has an evacuation plan ready. As soon as the revolution begins planes will fly into the Medellin airport to take us out of the country. I'm aware of all this, and I know that it is possible any day. And because of this, I believe that more than ever before, we need to be training Colombian men and women to reach their own people for Christ so that if anything happens, an army of Colombians will stand for the Lord Jesus Christ and for His gospel.

Chester Bitterman gave his life for the Colombian people. He knew the risks when he went there. We all know them now. Pray not just for missionaries and their families; pray with us for Colombians with whom we work every day, who expose themselves to constant danger just because they work with 'gringos' and because they believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One occurrence will show you what is happening in Latin America, and the hope we hold. Jaime Ortiz, president of the OMS-founded seminary in Colombia, is about five feet tall and I'm several inches over six feet. When Jaime and I walk downtown together, it's a circus. People stop their cars in the street just to look and I never know who they're laughing at, Jaime or me.

Jaime Ortiz, a strong believer in the authority of God's Word and the message of spiritual liberation, was invited by the accrediting association of seminaries in our area of

Latin America to participate in a debate between three Liberation Theologians ... and little Jaime Ortiz. Planners arranged the schedule so the several hours of debate would immediately precede election of officers for the accrediting association.

Jaime accepted the challenge and argued against his three opponents. In the course of Jaime's argument he began to show the intensity of his belief in the authority of God's Word, the priority of evangelism, and [p. 173](#) our responsibility to see that every man, woman, boy, and girl in Latin America has a chance to accept Jesus Christ as personal Saviour, experience His forgiveness and change in their lives.

When Jaime sat down, a man on the other side of the room said, 'The only reason you say that is because you've been bought with the dollars of the gringos.'

And Jaime pulled himself up to his full five foot stature and said, 'I say that not because I've been bought with the dollars of the gringos, but because I've been bought with the blood of Jesus Christ.'

Two hours later, Jaime Ortiz was elected president of the accrediting association of schools in the northern region of Latin America. Jaime has turned organization all the way around so that now it is being used to encourage evangelical scholarship in seminaries all over northern Latin America, to encourage young men and women to study the scriptures, to encourage professors to study God's Word and teach it boldly.

It can be done. Circumstances can change. The tide that's sweeping through Latin America can be stopped. Not just stopped, but can be turned. And that liberation movement that brings untold suffering to people throughout Latin America can be turned into blessing and power and joy and peace as the Holy Spirit of God sweeps through Latin America and establishes the kingdom of God in the hearts of men through conversion to Jesus Christ and the power of His Holy Spirit. Believe with us that God is not through with Latin America yet.

Ray Hundley serves with OMS International in Colombia, South America. [p. 174](#)

Theological Education: Is it Out of Practice?

Brian V. Hill

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This article is based on a lecture delivered to the Faculty of Union Biblical Seminary, Pune, India.

Theological education has a long pedigree reaching back through the centuries. It certainly pre-dates the development of studies into the teaching process as such, and may have something to learn from current educational theorizing and research. My thesis in this article will be that much theological education is 'out of this world', especially in the scant attention paid to experiences in the field. I will attribute this to some unfortunate

historical legacies, suggest some biblical correctives, and then propose some relevant educational strategies for those convinced of the need for reform.

I do so as one who is a layman to theologians, though professionally a trained teacher and philosopher of education. For most of those who write on theological education, the boot is on the other foot. I hope that the feedback I am giving from my side of the communion rail may be thought to have some relevance, since the products of theological training are called to minister to the *Laos* of God, and it is on this behalf that I speak.

UNFORTUNATE HISTORICAL LEGACIES

Historically speaking, theological education has largely been synonymous with the training of the clergy, viewed as a specially set-apart cadre in the church of God. A medieval view of the clergy has persisted into our time, leading us to think of the pastor of a church as a professional solo-performer, gathering up into himself all the functions scripturally identified with the 'gifts of the Spirit'. He is the shepherd; his congregation are the sheep, respectful of his office and submissive to his command. This has held us back from recognizing how extensive are the spiritual resources which lie buried in the average congregation, and the services which theological colleges should be extending to all the *Laos* of God.

A second unfortunate legacy has been the Greek model of [p.175](#) schooling.¹ The Greeks considered the education of upper class youths a matter too important to leave in the charge of the home. Instead, they were sent to schools and advanced academies run by professional teachers. The latter provided the model for the universities which later developed in the west. The Greek curriculum focuses particularly on academic studies in the literary mode, leading in its medieval imitations, to a very book-oriented, classroom-based emphasis on recitation. Along with this went a denigration of manual labour and technology, which were deemed to be the concern of the lower classes, and a disinterest in domestic and family relationships. Despite the demonstration of schooling as preached in the Reformation and hastened by industrialization, the schooling model continues to reflect most of these features, and to influence not only approaches to compulsory education but also learning styles in universities and seminaries.

A more detailed historical analysis than is appropriate here would of course acknowledge many good things in the Greek legacy as well. The Western intellectual tradition owes much to the Greek striving for knowledge, logic and objective reflection, and the founding of many disciplines of thought. But we seem almost to have learnt these lessons too well, to the detriment of the Hebraic side of our cultural tradition, to which I will refer in a moment.

The more unfortunate aspects of these legacies are reflected in the typical theological college in a variety of ways. It is rare, for example, to find lay students—that is, students not proceeding to ordination—in the class. It is equally rare to find colleges offering their courses off campus to facilitate lay participation, or developing specific lay-training courses. The great surge of interest in 'theological education by extension' is a testimony to the existence of a felt need amongst ordinary Christians and constitutes a rebuke both

¹ Useful references include William Barclay, *Educational Ideals in the Ancient World* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1974); Kenneth O. Gangel and Murren S. Benson, *Christian Education* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983); Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, one vol. ed. 1981). E. A. Judge, 'The Conflict of Educational Aims in New Testament Thought', *Journal of Christian Education*, vol. 9, June 1966; and Reinhold Niebuhr, 'The Two Sources of Western Culture', in *The Christian Idea of Education*, ed. Edmund Fuller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).

to the colleges which have held back from this kind of service, and to the clergy they have produced who do not, or can not, teach their people what they themselves have learnt.

Secondly, most theological seminaries still focus on the standard literary-academic disciplines—Old Testament studies and Hebrew, [p. 176](#) New Testament Studies and Greek, Church History and Missions and Systematic Theology—with low priority and status attached to educational, relational and administrative studies. When the churches are crying out for church leaders who can marshal the diverse gifts and ministries of their congregations, they are being given schoolmen who relate better to books than to people in the midst of life.

Linked with this weakness is the poor integration in training of theory and practice. Field experiences off-campus are often squeezed into extra-curricular time, evaluated less keenly than academic studies, and treated slightly as practical work unrelated to a theoretical rationale.

Again, most theological seminaries for status reasons covet comparison with universities or other tertiary institutions, seeking accreditation within the academic community at the cost of innovations they would like to introduce, because literary-academic criteria tend, in universities, to out-rank field work and clinical experience. The emphasis on achieving graduate standing encourages a concern in the novice clergyman for professional status in the eyes of his people. And since seminaries, like most universities, make it easier for school leavers than mature-age candidates to take their courses, the theological graduate is often deficient in that experience of life which is needed in a leader and pastor.

BIBLICAL CORRECTIVES

The first biblical perspective which I perceive to be relevant to this debate is the metaphor of the Church as a body whose members exhibit and develop a diversity of gifts. This is not, of course, the only metaphor of the Church used in the Bible. But it is significant, as John Stott pointed out fifteen years ago, that whereas images such as the bride of Christ, the vineyard tended by the divine gardener and the flock led by the great Shepherd have clear continuity with the Old Testament, the image of the Body of Christ has no direct Old Testament equivalent.² The priesthood stood in the way of such a metaphor. In the New Testament however, this image is appealed to often, and reference to the development of the gifts of all the *laos* is equally frequent.³

The Greek model of education is ill-fitted to service this ideal of the lay-training Church. It is therefore very significant that Paul's reaction [p. 177](#) to that model is extraordinarily fierce, especially regarding tertiary and adult education. Paul rejects the confinement of the teaching office to paid professionals.⁴ He abhors the accomplishments of the elite graduate, while showing in parody that he can play the same game.⁵ Edwin Judge has proved, more clearly than any other writer, that Paul is seeking to offer a

² John R. Stott, *One People* (London: Falcon Books, 1969), pp. 22–25.

³ See, for example, [Romans 12](#), [1 Cor. 12](#), [Ephesians 4](#), [1 Peter 4](#) and [5](#), 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus.

⁴ [Titus 1:11](#), referring to those who teach, in the KJV's colourful phrase 'for filthy lucre's sake', is a clear warning against copying 'Sophists' of Greek culture.

⁵ This is the force of the inverted 'boasted' passage in [2 Cor. 11:16–12:10](#).

distinctive alternative to the teaching model enshrined in Greek education.⁶ It is one focussing on mutual ministry according to gifts. In such a pattern, the theological graduate is not a solo-performer but a team coach—indeed, a ‘playing coach’—bring each member to peak condition as a fellow minister according to gift.

The second biblical corrective is the Hebraic epistemology or theory of knowledge. In contrast to the intellectualist Greek epistemology, stressing the abstract and objective features of knowledge, the Hebrew concept of knowing integrates thought and experience. As Adam knew Eve, and she conceived ([Gen. 4:1](#)), so we are counselled, using the same Hebrew word *yada* ([Ps. 46:10](#)), to know God both intellectually and experientially. The New Testament makes a similar demand in relation to the concept of belief in God ([James 2:18–19](#)).

This implies a pedagogy of *praxis*:⁷ of reflection followed by action, of learning followed by doing, of theory alternating with practice. Jesus exemplified this in the training of the apostolic team. First came teaching, then the charge to go out on mission, then the ‘de-briefing’ when they returned, coupled with further teaching.

The third biblical corrective is the notion that learning is passed on best within a master-disciple relationship. In contrast to the instructor verbalizing in front of a relatively passive large group, the Bible illustrates constantly the teaching value of a relationship: with parent, prophet or teaching elder. So much is learnt by osmosis and example, like the trade apprentice at the master craftsman’s elbow *as he plies his craft*. The apostolic group comes to mind, as also does the example of Socrates (to make amends to the Greeks for my earlier sweeping generalisations!). Paul depicts the kind of progression in [2 Tim 2:2](#), where Timothy is admonished to pass on to faithful men the things he had learned from Paul, who had learned them from Christ, so that they might teach others. In the divine pedagogy, each learner becomes a teacher. The lecture class mostly lacks the feature of a discipling [p. 178](#) relationship and needs to be supplemented by other teaching methods and learning environment.

The fourth corrective is the teaching that elders should be mature. In the cultural setting of first century Palestine, ‘elders’ were usually older in years as well as in maturity. In today’s changing world, the enduring feature in this is maturity. It rules out assigning major leadership roles to either callow youths or conservative oldsters. Biblical maturity requires three hallmarks: growth and stability in an experiential faith, a developed understanding of Christian beliefs, and a consistently Christian life-style, both domestically and publicly. The maturity criterion is a direct rebuke to our predilection for school-leavers, or, at one remove, young tertiary graduates who have not yet been in the work force.

RELEVANT EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES

Certain educational strategies seem to me to be clearly implied by the foregoing. The first is to *DETERMINE OBJECTIVES BEFORE SUBJECT MATTER*. I know only too well as a university teacher the tyranny of traditional academic priorities and ways of doing things. Most colleagues are very reluctant to look beyond their specialist subject matter and ask what sort of a graduate their professional programme as a whole is meant to produce. Christians cannot let this pass, for they are committed to seeing students as whole

⁶ See Judge, *op. cit.*, and ‘Classical Education and the Early Church’, *Journal of Christian Education*, papers 77, July 1983.

⁷ Karl Marx ideologised the term, making it serve his materialistic epistemology, but he had found it first in his Jewish background.

persons, and careers as ministries. But how successful are theological halls in implementing this strategy?

My impression gained from involvement in sundry reviews at state and national level in Australia, is that the tyranny extends to them also and is most evident in small colleges able to sustain only three or four full-time staff. Old Testament and New Testament are the first posts to be filled. What shall the third be? Invariably the choice is seen to be between Church History and Theology. No doubt these have to be taught, but are there no other claimants for the full-time post? What about educational skills in such areas as curriculum development, teaching, lay training and the identification of gifts? What about the theory and practice of evangelism, and of counselling in its many forms? What about administrative theory, group dynamics and experience in team leadership? And is there to be no analysis of modern society and culture?

Such priorities will only gain support from those who have begun by [p. 179](#) setting objectives which relate to the kind of church leader we need today, liberated from medieval stereotypes. Increasingly I find colleges responsive in theory to a re-sorting of priorities along these lines, but the political reality of present staff appointments keeps the applicative disciplines down to half-units taught by part-time staff.

A second necessary strategy is to *INTEGRATE THEORY AND PRACTICE*. If proper learning occurs only through praxis, where learning is promptly reinforced by doing, then ways must be found to keep academic study close to the field experiences relevant to it, and correlated with them. How, in practical terms, is this to be done? Some programmes in other professions use an *end-on* approach, whereby a practical professional topping is added after some years in academic disciplines. An example is the graduate Diploma in Education after a first degree. It is a conspicuously unpopular and ineffective way to produce teachers! After theoretical studies at some depth, graduates adapt only grudgingly to 'introductions' to the disciplines of education coupled with demoralisingly crammed teaching practice in schools.

A second possibility is *concurrent* study. Some seminaries encourage students to combine a part-time pastorate with their college studies. It is my observation that this creates a debilitating tug-of-war between the pastoral conscience and the studious mind, the more so because this is not really perceived by the lecturers as an opportunity to relate theory to practice. A third possibility is *field-based* course-work, whereby college lectures are given off-campus in the field situation. Some teacher-training has been attempted along these lines, taking the lecturers out to the schools where students have been placed. Again it is my observation that even where the lecturers are adaptable enough to relate their disciplines to the problems of the work place, there is a loss by this method of intellectual synthesis and integration.

My preference is for a *sandwich-course* approach, whereby campus-based semesters alternate with field-based semesters throughout the student's years of study, maybe in a ratio of two or three to one. It is crucial that the field-based semesters, though practical, be anchored in good theory, founded on the applicative disciplines, which would be taught in this time, and be accorded credit loadings on a parity with the more text-centred disciplines. Field work is not to be viewed as 'extra-curricular'.

The third educational strategy is to *STRUCTURE FIELD-WORK AS TRAINING*. It is simply not good enough to place the student in some parish situation and let whatever will develop. Simply being told to 'observe' is as unlikely to develop skills in the trainee as is being used [p. 180](#) by the minister simply for odd jobs. The curriculum of desired experiences needs to be specified, monitored, and related to parallel theoretical sessions. Several guidelines are worth stating.

The first is to ensure *quality control* by selecting with care the pastors, churches and other organisers to be used, having regard to the experiences specified in your curriculum. Participating persons then need to be clearly briefed on what the seminary wants them to provide for its students, and why. They ought also to be invited to participate in evaluation of the curriculum from time to time.

The second guideline is to *plan the field curriculum* so that it is not just a random series of experiences but a cumulative exposure to the various role-aspects of the church pastor's task. This implies the inclusion of a *range of roles*, including such settings as the pastor's study, the church business meeting, crisis counselling and lay training. Students should not become bogged down in just one function useful to the church to which they have been assigned, such as leading a regular youth Bible study.

Another important guideline is to *buttress the field-work with campus analysis*. Applicative studies such as those listed earlier should not be purely experiential or treated as optional odds and ends in the training of Church leaders on the biblical model. Without campus analysis and synthesis, the field experiences will be fragmented and regarded as unimportant.

The fourth major strategy is to *ENHANCE THE ROLE OF PASTORAL SUPERVISOR*. This is, after all, the closest analogue to the master-disciple learning model of Scripture.⁹ By 'enhancing' the role, I mean granting it greater status in terms of staff work load and recognition in the curriculum. The ideal people for this are full-time staff rather than hired hands, because they are most aware of the study-load borne by their students, and are likely to bring praxis more into their own courses as a result of being reminded of realities in the field by their students. Some staff will not sit comfortably in this role, but that is no ground for leaving them free to pursue academic goals while the more sympathetic staff bear all the burden of taking the seminary into the market-place through field supervision. An appropriate *quid pro quo* would be to give them a complementary market-place role in designing and offering external and extension courses in their subject areas for the *laos* beyond the college. p. 181

Supervisors need to brief, monitor and debrief their students in their field work, both at an individual level, and in a corporate way through related campus classes. They should also do the same for the tutors they recruit in the field, so that a definite plan of cumulative learning is followed and feedback is regularly obtained on how both students and tutors are faring. Such supervision must not be treated as extra to one's 'normal' lecturing load. Any college seeking to be biblical in its teaching style as well as its teaching content must see this as an integral part of one's normal work load.

Finally, seminaries should *DEVELOP PROGRAMMES OF CONTINUING EDUCATION*. Most colleges are predominantly concerned with pre-service training, save for occasional 'retreats' for graduates in the field. But the Hebraic rhythm of learning and doing should not be cut at graduation. Graduates should keep returning, by arrangement with their churches, for further pastoral and theological education, and taking advantage of external courses offered. Seminaries should not begrudge the time spent on providing such facilities, for staff are again bound to benefit from the feedback from the field in modifying their courses to achieve more effective praxis.

The difficulty is that many colleges are poorly situated to provide further pastoral, as well as theological education at an appropriate level of theoretical integration because all their specialists are in the four primary areas of theology. If the principles I have

⁹ See articles on Clinical Pastoral Education in the *Journal of Christian Education* by Robert E. Hockley: 'Clinical Pastoral Supervision—A Rationale', Papers 60, Nov. 1977 and Jinny Hall 'Reflections on Clinical Pastoral Education as a Learning Method, by a former student', papers 66, December 1979.

enunciated are to be given more than lip-service, they will have to be reflected quantitatively in staffing priorities and work-load formulae. Such reforms are difficult to achieve in secular universities, inhabited as they are by competitive individualists who resent interference in their autonomy to teach and research topics of interest to them. But it is surely reasonable to expect that such attitudes will be outweighed in institutions seeking to serve the body of Christ.

APOCRYPHAL CONCLUSION

The words of Paul in [Romans 12:1–10](#) provide a fitting conclusion to these reflections. I have interpolated some apocryphal amplifications which give the passage more purchase on the theological graduate's situation without, I hope, distorting the essential perspective of the passage.

I urge you brothers (and sisters) in view of God's mercy, to offer your (total personalities) as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God ... Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world (with its Greek and medieval hang-overs) but be transformed by the renewing of your [p. 182](#) (theological education) ... Do not (my young ordained friend) think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others (not excluding the fulltime clergyman). We have different gifts according to the grace given to us. (Your gift, dear colleague, is to draw out the gifts of others. Do not let your calling become an occasion for stifling the gifts of your people, or for preaching at a level which does not intersect with their life-concerns, or for enjoying a sanctified ego-trip). Be devoted to one another in (filial) love. Honour (your parishioners) above (yourself). (It is just possible that by these means you will be saved from theological hyper-ventilation).

Dr. Brian V. Hill is Dean of the School of Education, Murdoch University, Western Australia and Editor of *Journal of Christian Education*. [p. 183](#)

Book Reviews

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Faith and Church

IN WORD AND DEED

Edited by Bruce J. Nicholls
(Paternoster Press, U.K. 1985)
Pp. 238, £6.95 paperback

Reviewed by Sunand Sumithra

From June 16–23, 1982, some 50 evangelical leaders gathered at the Reformed Bible College, Grand Rapids, Michigan for a consultation on one of the most crucial topics of Christian debates in the decade: The Relationship Between Evangelism and Social Responsibility (CRESR). The consultation was sponsored by the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. These leaders came from six continents, the majority of them from the third world, and represented varied ministries: pastors, evangelists, missiologists, social service and development workers and theologians. The book is the outcome of this important meeting.

The title *In Word and Deed* very aptly describes the contents of the book. All the plenary papers of the Consultation are reproduced and adequately deal with the aim of the Consultation, namely, to educate and train Christians to commit themselves to a more effective gospel proclamation and social action. The chapters are arranged thematically: beginning with the historical and biblical perspectives on the question of social responsibility, the book goes on to discuss the eschatological aspects, and finally in the latter chapters, attempts to give an in-depth evangelical alternative to contemporary solutions.

The first chapter by Bong Rin Ro, 'The Perspective of Church History From New Testament Times to 1960' shows how evangelism and social responsibility have been inseparable throughout the ages and that they became an issue really in the mid-nineteenth century after the enlightenment. In the end he raises some very vital and relevant questions. Continuing from there, chapter two by Tokunboh Adeyemo, 'A Critical Evaluation of Contemporary Perspectives' describes the current scene. The third chapter (actually it is a response to the last) by David Bosch, 'In Search of a New Evangelical Understanding' outlines the recent developments in evangelical understanding of the subject and traces its causes to an evolution of ecumenical Christianity and as a post-world war phenomenon. The next chapter by Ronald J. Sider [p. 185](#) and James Parker III 'How Broad is Salvation In Scripture?' strongly argues for the priority of making disciples

based on the authority and sovereignty of Christ as the Lord of history. The next chapter by Arthur P. Johnston, 'The Kingdom in Relation to the Church and the World' reveals how a study of the concept of the Kingdom is susceptible to a wide spectrum of interpretations. He infers that the Kingdom is not 'embodied' in any political or social utopias, not even in the Church, though it is 'identified' with the latter. Therefore social action is understood as a fruit of evangelism. It might be added here that an earlier dialogue between Johnston and John Stott was the original catalyst for the Consultation. The next chapter, 'History and Eschatology: Evangelical Views' by Peter Kuzmič surveys the three traditional but crucial views of eschatology, the post-, pre- and amillennial kingdoms. He sees that belief in the total discontinuity between present times and the new heaven and earth without understanding the continuity inherent in the standing kingdom and in the resurrection leads to an escapist attitude and to minimising the role of culture and social involvement. The next chapter by Peter Beyerhaus 'A Biblical Encounter with Some Contemporary Philosophical and Theological Systems' is an in-depth analysis of the claims of some predominant current philosophies and ideologies, but positively develops a Christian apologetic against them. For obvious reasons he chooses Marxism, liberal ecumenism and scientism for his study. Understanding Church history as an interim period between the two comings of Christ, Beyerhaus pleads for a biblical critique of the several ecumenical utopias of our time and raises a warning finger against them. This leads naturally to the conclusion that the offering of salvation for eternal life was the priority of the Church in this period. In contrast, the next chapter by Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden on 'Evangelism and Social Responsibility: A Biblical Study of Priorities' highlights certain internal dialectics of the subject. Basically this dialectic boils down to the one between the individual and the corporate. Advocating a holistic biblical understanding of mission they conclude that the priority of one over the other depends primarily on the context. The final chapter by J. Chongnam Cho, 'The Mission of the Church: Theology and Practice' is an appropriate finale; starting with a survey of recent evangelical thinking on the mission of the church, it goes on to explore the biblical mandate in a fresh way and finally comes out with some very down-to-earth practical implications for both evangelism and the social responsibility of the Church. The conclusion emphasizes the importance of spiritual revival by the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. p. 186

The summary of the prepared responses appended to each of the papers gives a good balance and an editorial synopsis at the beginning of each paper is both necessary and valuable. One may miss both the background and the dynamics of the conference which could help much in understanding the contents. In addition, in a book of this sort indices would be useful for research. Even the final outcome, the Statement, could have been included with greater profit (which is available separately from the same publishers). One is grateful that at last and in spite of all the financial and other difficulties, this important book is now available. Dr. Bruce J. Nicholls, the editor, with his expertise in the field and Paternoster Press the publishers with theirs have done a great service to evangelicals in bringing out this book.

Theology and Culture

THIRD WORLD LIBERATION THEOLOGIES AN INTRODUCTORY SURVEY

by Deane William Ferm
(Maryknoll: Orbis Books)
Pp. 160, \$10.95

Here for the first time is a systematic survey of the principal liberation theologians from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Exposing the rich variety of Third World liberation theologies, the author highlights points of agreement and divergence in approaches and context, and critically assesses the most often heard criticisms of liberation theology. With its companion volume, *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader*, this survey represents the most comprehensive introduction, in any language, to what may well be the most significant theological development of this century.

'Deane William Ferm has put us greatly in his debt in this introductory survey of liberation theologies. This is a work that has been needed for some time. Ferm has provided a trustworthy guide for the study of theologians and movements providing creative initiatives in the doing of theology in the Third World.' *J. Deotis Roberts, Distinguished Professor of Philosophical Theology, Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Philadelphia.* p. 187

A READER

by Deane William Ferm
(Maryknoll: Orbis Books)
Pp. 400, \$16.95

A companion to *Third World Liberation Theologies: An Introductory Survey*, this volume contains representative selections from the works of the major Third World liberation theologians.

Contributors: *Latin America* Gustavo Gutiérrez, Juan Luis Segundo, Rubem Alves, Leonardo Boff, Hugo Assmann, Jon Sobrino, José Miranda, Segundo Galilea, J. B. Libânio, Eisa Tamez; *Africa* John Mbiti, Manas Buthelezi, Kofi Appiah-Kubi, Lamin Sanneh, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Eugene Hillman, Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak; *Asia* Kosuke Koyama, Choan-Seng Song; Tissa Balasuriya, Francisco F. Claver, Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, Samuel Rayan, Henriette Katoppo, Albert Widjaja, Kim Yong-Bok.

BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA

by Byang H. Kato
(Achimota, Ghana: Africa Christian Press, 1985)
Pp. 54, £0.00

Reviewed by Bruce J. Nicholls

This monograph is the second in a new series—Theological Perspectives in Africa—edited by Tite Tienou. The series is designed to provide theological perspectives on vital issues facing Christianity in Africa today. The material presented here is of historical significance as it represents one of the first of the post-war generation of evangelical African theologians. At the time of his untimely death in December 1975 Dr. Kato was General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM), Vice-President of the World Evangelical Fellowship and Chairman of the WEF Theological Commission. He received training in Nigeria and England and his Th.D from Dallas Theological Seminary, U.S.A.

This monograph is a collection of five papers and addresses presented at conferences in Africa and one at the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization given over a brief

span of two years. Kato's one major book, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (based on his doctoral thesis) was reviewed in the first issue of the *Evangelical Review of Theology* (October 1977). A further reason for its importance is its p. 188 'abiding relevance for all those who today share Kato's vision for a Christianity on the continent that will be, in Kato's phrase, "truly biblical and truly African"' (Tite Tienou). What comes through in this book is Kato's loyalty to the authority and finality of the Bible as the Word of God relevant for every culture and in every situation. Kato maintained that Africans need to formulate theological concepts in the language of Africa but the Bible must remain the basic source of Christian theology. He writes 'Evangelical Christians know of only one theology—biblical theology—though it may be expressed in the context of each cultural milieu' (p. 12). From this perspective he evaluates all attempts to formulate African theologies.

In the first chapter entitled 'Theological Anemia in Africa' Kato warns that biblical Christianity in Africa is being threatened by syncretism, universalism and Christopaganism. He endorses John Mbiti's statement that 'Mission Christianity was not from the start prepared to face serious encounter with either traditional religions and philosophy or the modern changes taking place in Africa. The church here now finds itself in the situation of trying to exist without a theology'. In the chapter 'The Theology of Eternal Salvation' Kato briefly discusses the nature of man's alienation from God, the role of general revelation and the uniqueness of salvation in Christ.

In his address given at Lausanne, 'Contextualization and Religious Syncretism in Africa' Kato acknowledges the importance of contextualization (the incarnation itself is a form of contextualization) but most of the address is directed to an analysis of religious syncretism in Africa. He is very critical of the African anthropologist Okot p'Pitek and of J. K. Agbeti of Ghana who argue for the assimilation into Christianity of the religious festivals and practices of the traditional religions of Africa. Kato is more cautious in his criticism of Professor John Mbiti and Bolaji Idowu, whose high views of African traditional religions are in danger of leading them to a syncretistic theology and the assimilation of idolatrous practices. In the fourth essay 'Christianity as an African Religion' Kato shows the historical roots of Christianity in Africa and the exclusive- and inclusiveness of Christianity. In the final essay he takes up in more detail the already familiar themes of syncretism and universalism with a severe critique of ecumenical theology and of black theology.

This collection of materials is strong in Christian apologetics but somewhat weak in detailing an evangelical theology for the African context. No doubt if Byang Kato were still alive today such an exposition would have been forthcoming. As one who knew Byang well and spent a month with him in Nairobi just before his death I p. 189 commend this slight volume for its value as a basic introduction to the issue facing Christian theology in the African context. Africa Christian Press is to be congratulated on the attractive cover and the high quality of printing (undertaken in England) of this monograph.

Ethics and Society

EVANGELICALS AND DEVELOPMENT: TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Edited by Ronald J. Sider
(Westminster, 1981)

Pp. 123, \$3.80

Reviewed by Mariano Di Gangi in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 27, No. 4, December 1984.

This book comes out of a Consultation on the Theology of Development held at High Leigh in England under the sponsorship of the Unit on Ethics and Society of the World Evangelical Fellowship's Theological Commission. It defines development as 'a process by which people gain greater control over themselves, their environment and their future, in order to realize the full potential of life that God has made possible' (p. 19).

That Christians should be involved in works of mercy and justice flows from our Lord's command concerning love to neighbour. How God works in society, however, is the subject of vigorous debate. While some see God's preservation of life in the general course of his providence, the contributors to this volume believe that God operates 'in all human history within and beyond the church to apply the redemption summed up in Christ. God is at work to apply the results of the atonement and resurrection to the whole of creation' (p. 20). We are exhorted 'to see the work of struggle for social change and for justice as part of the means of applying the work of redemption which has been won in Christ, whether or not the work is carried on by Christians' (p. 59).

In seeking to avoid any dichotomy between creation and redemption, physical and spiritual, temporal and eschatological, body and soul, the authors of this stimulating volume come close to advocating a monism that confuses these useful and valid distinctions.

The poverty of many regions of the world is blamed on oppressor groups supported by 'international structures of injustice ... multinational companies, capitalism', and the 'social Darwinism behind capitalism' (pp. 23, 42). While Marxism may be faulted for advocating p. 190 violence to attain liberation, socialist regimes are commended for having sought 'to demonstrate another pathway of planned economics that elevates the common good above private gain' (p. 80). While the mania of our acquisitive, consumptive and status-seeking society needs to be exposed as morally evil, is it not also true that personal freedoms are at risk when people become dependent on an all-controlling state for their guarantee of subsistence?

The concluding chapter, by an Asian Christian, deals with the implications of western theologies of development for third-world countries and churches. Through the use of case studies he points up the need to 'develop self-reliance along with justice and economic growth' rather than propagate a paternalism that denies equality and dignity to those we would assist (p. 89). On the other hand, we are reminded that 'poor stewardship and losses occur when well-meaning missionaries help selected individuals who build up private empires, or little known church groups who later prove to be spurious' (p. 100). It requires discernment as well as compassion if 'the church is to incarnate the gospel of Christ in word and deed, so that men and women become faithful disciples' (p. 101).

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

by John Howard Yoder
(Scottsdale, Pa. Herald Press, 1983)
Pp. 119, \$6.95

Reviewed by Ken Brown in *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Vol. LIX, No. 3, July 1985.

"What would you do if a criminal, say, pulled a gun and threatened to kill your wife?"

John Howard Yoder brings his impressive scholarship to bear on this question, one of the most frequent challenges to pacifists. In the first section, intended primarily for

academics, he analyses the arbitrary assumptions on which the cavil is based: that the attacker intends the worst; that our own violence will be successful; that our decision-making is individualistic; and that we self-righteously become judge, jury and executioner. He notes the self-centredness in preferential love of victim over attacker and the simplistic assumption that there are only two options. Martyrdom and natural or providential intervention are two others. The last section of the book, 'But Does It Really Work?' gives six autobiographical examples of other ways out, all successful. I found myself searching for at least one instance of martyrdom. [p. 191](#)

Yoder rightly questions whether issues of personal defence have anything to do with the pacifist objection to war. He indicates dissimilarities: the location of the violence; the identity of the victims; the lack of judicial review or legitimate higher authority in war; ambiguities of guilt and pre-meditation; and differences in decisionmaking. Philosophically, the last point is especially important. Morality rests on the presupposition of autonomy, i.e., personal freedom to choose. In warfare, responsibility is transferred from the individual to an unquestioned chain of command. Thus, participation in war, unlike personal defence, is incompatible with the fundamental moral requirement of retaining control over one's own actions.

Philosophies of non-violence should be clearly separated from pacifism, which denotes opposition to war. Merton and Gandhi approved self-defence but disapproved participation in war (Gandhi was not always consistent). Luther advocated participation in war but opposed self-defence. Yoder's theological confession, of course, encompasses both dimensions. 'I accept Jesus' way because it is my confession.' The Christian's answer to 'What would you do if ...' is to work for a 'natural way out, pray for a providential deliverance, and accept, if necessary, martyrdom.' We seek to deal with the aggressor as God in Christ has dealt with us and as we ourselves would wish to be dealt with.

The book's second section, like the third, is an anthology. Tolstoy's letter is excellent reading and sounds contemporary. There are actions, he says, such as violence, that are morally impossible for the Christian. Tolstoy argues that, although hypothetical cases can be devised that would challenge any moral law, they do not invalidate it. 'Do what's right, come what may.' Joan Baez, in a delightful selection from her autobiography, advises: 'If you have a choice between a real evil and a hypothetical evil, always take the hypothetical one.... The point of non-violence is to build a floor, a strong new floor, beneath which we can no longer sink.' Dale Brown adds that hypothetical questions may be a way to escape real ones, such as, 'What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ in our kind of world?' Dale Aukerman reminds us of Jesus' exemplary intervention when a woman was about to be stoned ([Jn. 8:2-11](#)). 'The *skandalon* (stumbling block) for the church ... has not been the defencelessness of Jesus ... but rather the corollary that his people should be defenceless in the same way.'

What Would You Do? raises fundamental issues. Although the book seems directed, sequentially, to academics and then to general readers, both audiences will benefit from it. [p. 192](#)

Journal Information

Publications Referred to in this Issue

Christianity Today

Published 18 issues a year (semi-monthly) by Christianity Today, Inc., 465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188, U.S.A. Subscription rates: One year \$21. Outside U.S. add \$4 postage prepaid currency. \$2.00 per copy.

EKD Bulletin

Published quarterly, free of charge by Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, Editorial Office, GEP, Friedrichstrasse 2-6, D-6000 Frankfurt/Main, Federal Republic of Germany.

Freedom—TEAR Fund Bible Study Booklet Number Four

Published by TEAR Fund, 11 Station Road, Teddington, Middlesex, TW11 9AA, U.K.

Journal of Evangelical Theological Society

Published quarterly by Evangelical Theological Society, c/o Reformed Theological Seminary, 5422 Clinton Boulevard, Jackson, MS 39209, U.S.A. Subscription rates: \$15.00 per year.

The Mennonite Quarterly Review

Published quarterly by The Mennonite Historical Society for Goshen College of the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, AMS Press, Inc., 56 E. 13th St., New York, NY 10003, U.S.A. Subscription rates: \$17.00 North America, elsewhere \$18.00

The Oppressed, Liberation and Good News to the Poor

Published by Christian Literature Society, Post Box 501, Park Town, Madras 600 003, India. pp. 39, Rs 6.00 (India only).

Theology, News and Notes

Published quarterly by Fuller Theological Seminary Alumni, 135 North Oakland Avenue, Pasadena CA 91101-1790, U.S.A.